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STARS AND STRIPES®

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Free to Deployed Areas



Gitmo not part of US-Cuba bargain

By CAROL ROSENBERG
Miami Herald

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration has no intention of withdrawing from the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, despite the sudden shift in U.S.-Cuban relations.

"There is no impact to Guantanamo from the changes announced today," the National Security Council spokeswoman, Bernadette Meehan, said Wednesday evening.

Hours earlier, at the U.S. outpost in southeast Cuba, base spokeswoman Kelly Wirfel said amid reports

that American prisoner Alan Gross was on his way to freedom that there was no change in security posture at the

45-square-mile outpost of about 6,000 residents that straddles Guantanamo Bay and sits behind a Cuban minefield.

From the earliest days of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro sought to get the U.S. out of the base — a prime piece of real estate long before the George W. Bush administration decided to put its iconic war-on-terrorism prison there.

Successive U.S. administrations have said the military has permanent tenancy under a 1934 treaty made public by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The United States cuts an annual check for \$4,085 in rent, even though the Cuban government does not cash it.

Wednesday, a senior Obama official told McClatchy that Cuban diplomats object to the continued U.S. presence on the base "in every discussion ... but there won't be change to that status quo."

SEE GITMO ON PAGE 13

COMING NEVER

N. Korea blamed after fear of terrorist attacks scuttles film

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A Carmike Cinemas worker takes down a poster for the movie "The Interview" on Wednesday in Atlanta. Sony Pictures Entertainment took the unprecedented step of canceling the comedy's Dec. 25 release under the threat of terrorist attacks from hackers. DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It's important to remember that Maryland is not the battlefield and we are not the enemy."

— David Rocah, senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, on the U.S. military testing a cruise missile defense system by launching a blimp-like airship at Aberdeen Proving Ground near Baltimore

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2. Hundreds of US troops now deployed in Iraq's Anbar province
3. Soldier who deserted, served in French Foreign Legion is sentenced to 4 years in prison
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COMING SOON



Shifting Gears

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MILITARY

Police officer is killed in Afghan suicide bombing

By **LYNNE O'DONNELL**
AND **AMIR SHAH**
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Afghan police officer was killed and three were wounded Thursday when a suspected suicide bomber they were pursuing detonated his explosives-laden vehicle, an official said.

The Taliban issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack.

The bomber "was trying to enter Kabul with the intention of detonating explosives in a crowded part of the city," said Hashmat Stanekzai, spokesman for the Kabul provincial police chief. "He was being followed by police."

The explosion occurred after police stopped the car, said Kabul provincial police chief, Abdul Rahman Rahimi.

Afghan authorities regularly claim to have thwarted attacks on

the capital as the insurgents concentrate on government, military and foreign targets.

Five foreigners have been killed in the past month in attacks on soft targets such as a French-run school last week, where a German aid worker was killed.

The U.S.-led international combat mission, which peaked in 2010 with 140,000 American and NATO troops, ends on Dec. 31. Afghan security forces will assume full responsibility on Jan. 1, with a residual international force of around 13,000 to provide training and support.

The head of Afghanistan's intelligence service said the drawdown of foreign troops had made it more difficult to track down militants.

Under pressure to explain the rise in attacks on Kabul, Rahmatullah Nabil, chief of the National Security Directorate, told parliament Wednesday that the removal of manpower and tech-



MASSOUD HOSSAINI/AP

Afghan security forces inspect the site of a suicide attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Thursday. An Afghan official says a suicide bomber detonated his vehicle as it was being followed by police on the outskirts of the capital, killing a police officer and wounding others.

nology by withdrawing foreign forces had contributed to the spike in violence.

In Helmand province, he said, 65 surveillance balloons had been removed with the closure of U.S. and British bases last month. "Now I have just six agents working there," he said.

Nabil added there were 107 terrorist cells in the provinces surrounding Kabul while the city's

preparedness is severely lacking and outdated.

Also Thursday, Kabul criminal investigation chief Farid Afzali said arrests had been made connection with the killing last week of a senior Supreme Court official.

Atiqullah Raoufi was shot dead on Saturday as he was walking from his home to his vehicle by assailants on motorcycles.

Afghan who fled US training sent to Canada

By **CAROLYN THOMPSON**
The Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — One of three Afghan military officers detained after fleeing a U.S. training exercise to avoid returning to Afghanistan has been allowed to make a refugee claim in Canada, his attorney said Wednesday.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement turned over Capt. Mohammad Nasir Askarzada to Canadian authorities on Tuesday, spokesman Khaalid Walls confirmed.

Askarzada, along with Maj. Jan Arash and Capt. Noorullah Aminyar, took a cab from Massachussetts to New York in September

and walked into Niagara Falls, Ontario, to seek refugee status.

The three, who had been participating in a joint military training exercise in Cape Cod, said they fear Taliban retribution in Afghanistan because of their work with U.S. soldiers.

Attorney Razmeen Joya said Canadian immigration officials agreed to reconsider Askarzada's request to make a refugee claim after she submitted documents showing he has a close relative in Canada.

"He is also with relatives here who are staying with him at the border yesterday to accompany him home," the Toronto attorney said by email Wednesday.

Canada had denied the three men entry and returned them to the United States, which moved to deport them. Arash and Aminyar remain at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility in Batavia pending removal proceedings. ICE will drop its case against Askarzada, the agency said.

A 2004 agreement between Canada and the United States requires people seeking asylum at Canada-U.S. land border crossings to apply in whichever country they arrive in first. Exceptions can be made for claimants with relatives in Canada.

If ordered deported, Arash and Aminyar are expected to seek asylum in the United States.

German soldiers get OK for Afghanistan mission

BERLIN — Lawmakers have given the go-ahead for Germany to contribute up to 850 soldiers to the NATO-organized training and advisory mission in Afghanistan that will start work next month.

The lower house of Parliament voted 473-102 on Thursday to support the deployment, with 18 abstentions, the news agency dpa reported. German military missions abroad require parliamentary approval.

Germany has been a major troop contributor in Afghanistan's north over the past decade and will continue to be responsible for that region in the new mission, called Resolute Support.

From The Associated Press

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WAR ON TERRORISM

Hundreds of American troops deployed in Iraq's Anbar province

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of American troops are now in Iraq's volatile Anbar province helping the Iraqi military take on the Islamic State, Joint Chiefs of Staff officials said.

Currently, about 350 U.S. troops are stationed at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar. The force is composed of advisers and support personnel who are assisting the Iraqi army, as well as a security contingent tasked with providing force protection.

The troops on the ground are helping the 7th Iraqi Division with developing security strategies, mission planning, information sharing, and coordinating close air support operations.

Service members in Anbar are not fighting alongside Iraqi forces nor standing near the front lines calling in airstrikes, officials said.

These people "are not accompanying Iraqi forces into combat," said Col. Ed Thomas, the chief spokesman for Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey.

President Barack Obama has ruled out sending American ground troops back into combat in Iraq, and has limited the military mission to training and equipping Iraqi troops fighting the Islamic State.

On Tuesday, there were media reports that American troops in Anbar had been in a direct fight

with militants near Al Asad. Multiple U.S. defense officials said those reports were false.

Last month, military officials revealed that about 50 American special operators had deployed to Al Asad, some 110 miles northwest of Baghdad, in order to lay the groundwork for a new training effort.

U.S. troops in Iraq previously had been confined to facilities near Baghdad and Irbil.

The number of advisers in Anbar has increased significantly since then, Thomas said. He did not say how many of the 350 troops now in Anbar are preparing for the training mission, which will take place at four training sites throughout Iraq.

The formal training effort isn't expected to start until early next year, officials said.

"We are still in the process of flowing in additional troops in the overall effort to Build Partner Capacity, which will enable Iraqi forces by providing training and expertise in military capabilities such as mission command, intelligence, maneuver, and sustainment and medical support," Joint Staff spokeswoman Army Capt. Catalina Rosales said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

The force is currently about 1,700 American troops in Iraq. That number is expected to increase to about 3,000 in the coming months.

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Iraqi Kurdish troops open corridor to Sinjar

By DALTON BENNETT
The Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi Kurdish forces battling Islamic State militants managed on Thursday to open up a corridor to Sinjar Mountain so that thousands of people from the country's Yazidi minority who have been trapped there can flee, said a senior Kurdish official.

The development was an incremental step in the battle to retake the town of Sinjar, at the foothills of the mountain by the same name, which fell to the Islamic State group in early August. . Iraqi Kurdish

The Kurdish peshmerga troops, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, launched the operation to retake the Islamic State-held Sinjar on Wednesday.

Masrur Barzani, chancellor of Kurdistan Region Security Council, said the Kurdish forces advanced in battle, establishing the passageway to the mountain on Thursday.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis became trapped in the mountain

in early August, when the Islamic State extremists captured the towns of Sinjar and Zumar, prompting the exodus.

Many were eventually airlifted off the mountain or escorted by a passageway through Syria back into Iraq, to find refuge in the Iraqi Kurdish semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, but thousands more came later and remained stuck on the mountain.

"Our hope is that all those people will eventually be able to go back to their own homes and villages and towns but those that are in need of evacuation now, a corridor has been opened to evacuate those people," Barzani told The Associated Press in Irbil, the Kurdish regional capital.

Yazidis follow an ancient religion with ties to Zoroastrianism.

The Kurdish forces, known also as peshmerga, said in September that they would focus on Sinjar after liberating the nearby towns of Rabia, Mahmoudiya and Zumar.



CHRIS CARROLL/Stars and Stripes

Army Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, speaks to reporters Thursday in the Pentagon.

US wary about ramping up airstrikes on Islamic State

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pentagon officials are expressing caution about intensifying the air war against Islamic State militants despite calls by Iraqi leaders to step up the pace of airstrikes.

Since the bombing campaign against the Islamic State began in August, the international coalition has conducted more than 1,300 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, the bulk by American forces.

During a visit to Iraq earlier this month by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Iraqi leaders called for more bombing, according to Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby. But U.S. military officials have indicated that they're not inclined to ramp up operations — at least not in the near term.

One major concern for the Pentagon is the risk of civilian or friendly-fire casualties, which could create operational and political problems for the coalition. "The coalition is really very deliberate about how it conducts strikes out there," Army Lt. Gen. James Terry, the commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, told reporters at the Pentagon on Thursday.

"We have some great capability in terms of precision. [But] what's in the balance here is, if you're not careful ... you can strike [Sunni] tribes, you could strike [Iraqi] security forces, and you could create a very bad situation ... We're very conscious of any collateral damage."

Terry said that up to this point, he's seen no reports of civilian casualties resulting from coalition airstrikes.

Another issue that makes call-

“We have some great capability in terms of precision. [But] what's in the balance here is, if you're not careful ... you can strike [Sunni] tribes, you could strike Iraqi security forces, and you could create a very bad situation ... We're very conscious of any collateral damage.”

Army Lt. Gen. James Terry, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve

ing in strikes more challenging is the fact that the U.S. has no forward air controllers near the front lines spotting targets. The Obama administration doesn't want American ground forces directly involved in combat operations, and U.S. troops therefore are required to stay away from the fight.

According to Terry, the process in place now requires U.S. advisers and Iraqi personnel at the division headquarters level report back to joint operations centers in Baghdad and Irbil about the locations of Iraqi forces and Islamic State fighters. American intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft flying overhead also feed information to the JOCs. Officials at the JOCs then use that information to tell coalition aircrews where to strike.

Some Iraqi leaders are reportedly keen to go on the offensive in places like Mosul, an Islamic State stronghold. But American military officials feel like the ISF needs more training and preparation before launching such operations.

"It takes some patience as we continue to build the Iraqi security forces out there," Terry said.

He said it will take "a minimum of three years" before the ISF and Kurdish peshmerga are capable of defeating the Islamic State group.

A large contingent of American trainers will begin deploying to Iraq in the coming weeks, according to Terry.

When it comes to airstrikes, "We've been very effective in delivering those fires" and "I think we've got it just about right," Terry said.

A U.S. military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Stars and Stripes that the Iraqis' desire for more American assistance was understandable, but according to those demands at the present time wouldn't be in America's interest.

"A government dealing with an adversary like [the Islamic State] is always going to want the most military capability possible," the official said, but "our pace needs to be such that we ... [aren't] getting too far out in front of the ISF and making this our fight" instead of an Iraqi fight.

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PACIFIC



GRACE LEE/Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Airmen of the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., work on an F-35 on Dec. 5.

Japan, Australia to provide maintenance for US F-35s

By WYATT OLSON
AND MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Japan and Australia will provide maintenance and upgrades for U.S.-made F-35 fighter jets in the Pacific, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

The countries will split the duties, with Australia servicing aircraft in the South Pacific and Japan handling the north region, a division of labor that is expected to save time and money.

"If you're having airplanes in the northern Pacific that need a rapid upgrade to respond to a new threat, having to move them 7,000 miles to do that [modification] in Australia, or vice versa, has an operational impact," Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan told reporters in Washington, D.C., Wednesday.

Australia is expected to have the facility operational no later than early 2018. Japan will have its operation up and running three to five years later, or as late as 2023.

The Pentagon did not specify where the maintenance facilities would be located. Inquiries to U.S. Forces Japan about locations were referred to U.S. Pacific Command. A spokesman

at PACOM said Wednesday he did not know the locations.

However, Bryan Bullerick, president of defense contractor BGSE Group, said in an email that his firm had completed an F-35 repair hangar at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni on the Japanese mainland and that "more would be coming in Iwakuni."

Bullerick said his firm had also been contacted by a design firm in charge of constructing an F-35 hangar at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. That firm asked to use BGSE equipment as a basis for its design.

Australian Defense Minister David Johnston said in a news release Wednesday that the facilities in his country would likely be based at one of two east coast sites: Royal Australian Air Force Base Amberley or RAAF Base Williamtown.

Amberley, near Brisbane in Queensland, is the RAAF's largest base. Williamtown base is to the south in New South Wales and is headquarters to Australia's Air Combat Group.

The Pentagon announced last week that heavy maintenance for F-35s in Europe would be done in Italy and Turkey.

Bogdan said that after the full

fleet of F-35s are in the Pacific and Japan has completed its facilities, the Pentagon will "see if these decisions are still appropriate and if we have to make any kind of adjustments in terms of the assignment capabilities moving forward."

The F-35 maintenance depot in the U.S. is located in Fort Worth, Texas, Bogdan said, but Japan's will likely be configured differently than it and the one in Italy.

"Both the plant at Fort Worth and the plant in Italy are expansive in terms of distance on the ground," he said, as compared with Japan's vertical design.

Work will take place on a number of floors, moving through the process on elevators, Bogdan told reporters.

He said Japan is responsible for the funding and construction of its facility, which will be operated by a Japanese company. Reuters reported Wednesday that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries would handle the work in Japan initially.

Bogdan said Lockheed Martin would have oversight in Italy and Japan, with security maintained by the U.S.

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Sex workers who served US troops get day in court

By ASHLEY ROWLAND
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Former sex workers who have sued the South Korean government, claiming it encouraged them to prostitute themselves to U.S. troops after the Korean War, have their first court hearing Friday.

The 122 elderly women are asking for more than \$1.2 million, an official apology from the government and an investigation into South Korea's oversight of their work. The South Korean government and Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn were named in the suit, which alleges that Seoul began encouraging the women to work as prostitutes for U.S. servicemen in the 1950s, a practice that continued into the 1970s. A ministry litigation officer declined to comment on the case.

"They were victims of history," said Kim Milkyoung, one of the attorneys for the women. She was one of several people who confirmed the contents of the lawsuit, filed June 25. The Seoul Central District Court would not provide a copy to Stars and Stripes, citing rules that bar the general release of such documents.

At the recent case, the former prostitutes' history has been relatively unknown. But experts have said that the South Korean government, fearing that the U.S. would withdraw its troops from the peninsula, encouraged the women to prostitute themselves to U.S. servicemen to keep them happy and to bring American dollars into a struggling economy.

Many of the now elderly women still live outside the bases they once served. In Anjeong-ri, a neighborhood within sight of Camp Humphreys, many of the women have lived in squalid housing, unable to afford better in an area where rent has skyrocketed as the base has expanded.

Experts say most of the women have had difficult lives, many unable to find husbands and some giving birth to children fathered by U.S. troops. Some of the women gave their children up for adoption or raised them in relative isolation because of the dual stigmas of being an unwed mother and having interracial children.

The government insisted the women register at clinics for regular health checks. A story in Stars and Stripes from Nov. 2, 1971, described how U.S. and Korean officials monitored the health of U.S. servicemen and the prostitutes.

Soldiers with venereal disease were treated and asked to identify the prostitutes they had been involved with from books of photos of every prostitute treated at a Korean government health clinic. A U.S. military vice control team would then help South Korean police locate the women and take them to an "isolation ward" for mandatory treatment, usually consisting of twice-daily penicillin shots for four days.

A bill calling for financial support for the women's living expenses and additional research into the government's involvement and its alleged oversight of the women is pending in the National Assembly.

An aide to Kim Kwangjin, one of 10 lawmakers who sponsored the bill, filed this summer, said police and health centers told the women they were conducting "patriotic acts" with U.S. troops.

"This bill is to let people know that the women are victims and the state needs to take responsibility for them," he said.

Lee Na-young, a sociology professor at Chung-Ang University in Seoul, said Seoul is unlikely to concede that it encouraged prostitution. "South Korea achieved its national security by using women's bodies and sex," she said.

The women have had little money or backing to sue the government, she said. But increased attention on another group known in South Korea as "comfort women," who were forced into sexual slavery during the Japanese occupation, has benefited the former prostitutes. Both groups support each other, with the former prostitutes attending weekly rallies that the comfort women hold outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

The U.S. military has said it is aware of the case but declined to comment on the women's claims or the lawsuit. A statement after the suit was filed said U.S. Forces Korea has zero tolerance for prostitution.

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MILITARY

Company ordered to release vehicles

By ADAM L. MATTHIS
Stars and Stripes

A Defense Department subcontractor was ordered on Wednesday to release dozens of servicemembers' and civilians' vehicles seized in a financial dispute between the subcontractor and its partner company.

A U.S. District Court judge ordered Liberty Global Logistics, based in Lake Success, N.Y., to release 66 vehicles held as a lien against more than \$3.6 million the company claimed it was owed

by International Auto Logistics, the Defense Department's contractor responsible for shipping Defense Department employees' vehicles.

Liberty is also enjoined from seizing any more vehicles unless given permission by the court.

Liberty seized the vehicles on Dec. 11 after it claimed International stopped making payments on "undisputed ocean freight," according to court documents. The company also claimed — in a document opposing International — that International

owed almost \$20 million in other fees.

International argued the two companies had been in negotiations and the seizure was nothing more than "self-help thuggery."

International and Liberty have had disputes about money reaching back to at least September, with Liberty citing a lack of payment and International arguing it was not receiving adequate shipping information to pay bills. Wednesday's order requires International to pay ocean freight bills "that the parties have agreed

are due and owing through Friday" to Liberty. International must also stay current on all future charges on a weekly basis and Liberty must provide "appropriate and adequate billing support."

The judge ordered both sides to settle any outstanding issues by arbitration.

International has faced heavy criticism for the late delivery of vehicles and failure to provide accurate tracking information.

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ROTC sergeant is acquitted of rape

SPEARFISH, S.D. — An ROTC sergeant at Black Hills State University has been found not guilty of raping a cadet in the program, but guilty of furnishing alcohol to an underage woman last spring.

The Rapid City Journal reports that 39-year-old Cesar Olaso was recently sentenced to serve three days in jail and spend a year on probation.

Olaso would have faced up to 25 years in prison had he been convicted on the rape charge.

Army Col. Lynna Speier says Olaso remains suspended from his ROTC duties pending a military review.

From The Associated Press

Security firm gets contract after protest is dismissed

By MATT MILLHAM
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — An Army contract for security at its bases in Germany is moving ahead after the U.S. Government Accountability Office dismissed a protest against the award.

The decision essentially upholds the four-year, \$334 million contract the Army awarded to Pond Security Service in October.

"Naturally we're pleased to hear the good news," said Chad Geier, Pond's chief of staff. "But we more or less expected it to go this way."

Early in the year, Pond — which has been providing security to U.S. Army posts since the 1980s — lost a bid to continue the job to German rival Sicherheit Nord. That award was canceled two months later after protests to the GAO by Pond and U.S.-based security company Triple Canopy.

GAO dismissed those complaints after the Army agreed to undertake "remedial action," which included reopening the competition and allowing companies that had originally bid on the contract to provide additional information about their offers.

The Army is now moving forward with Pond, said a spokeswoman for the Army's 490th Contracting Support Brigade.

The decision was the second bit of good news Pond received this week. On Monday, the company announced it it won a contract to guard American school buses.

A spokesman for the Department of Defense Dependents Schools-Europe said Pond was awarded the contract to provide security attendants on its buses in the central European sector, which covers the Bavaria and Kaiserslautern districts in Germany. That contract, valued at \$21 million, includes a six-month base period with four one-year options, said DODDS-Europe spokesman Bob Furtman.

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MILITARY

Military airships getting a test near Baltimore

By DAVID DISHNEAU
The Associated Press

The U.S. military is testing a new cruise-missile defense system by launching a blimp-like airship at Aberdeen Proving Ground near Baltimore.

Reporters in the region got their first look Wednesday at JLENS, short for Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System.

When fully deployed this winter, the system will feature two unmanned, helium-filled aerostats, tethered to concrete pads four miles apart. They'll float at an altitude of 10,000 feet in a planned, three-year test. One will use radar to continuously scan in a 340-mile radius, roughly from Norfolk, Va., to upstate New York. The other will carry precision radar, enabling controllers on the ground to pinpoint targets.

The aerostats won't carry weapons, military officials say. Enemy missiles would be destroyed by ground- or ship-based weapons.

"The point of this exercise is to test how well it would integrate with existing systems to do cruise missile defense around the national capital region," said Air Force Maj. Beth Smith of the

'The point of this exercise is to test how well it would integrate with existing systems to do cruise missile defense around the national capital region.'

Air Force Maj. Beth Smith
North American Aerospace Defense Command.

North American Aerospace Defense Command.

JLENS, built by Raytheon Co., has cost the government about \$2.8 billion so far. Congress approved another \$43.3 million last week for the first year of the test.

Proponents say JLENS will save money in the long run by reducing the need for surveillance by conventional aircraft.

"The analysis we've done says it's about five to seven times less than operating a fleet of aircraft to cover the same area over the same time period," said Douglas Burgess, Raytheon's JLENS pro-



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

U.S. Air Force Col. William Pitts walks in front of an unmanned aerostat that is part of a new U.S. military cruise-missile defense system during a media preview Wednesday in Middle River, Md.

gram director.

The fat, white balloons, each 80 yards long, are part of a new wave of lighter-than-air surveillance vehicles. The government also has deployed tethered airships near the Mexican border, in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the Caribbean Ocean to combat drug smuggling.

JLENS pairs two aerostats in a single "orbit." A second orbit is

being held in reserve at the Utah Test and Training Range near Salt Lake City.

The airships at Aberdeen will be the first of their type near major East Coast cities, visible to large numbers of people in the Interstate 95 corridor.

The military says the balloons won't carry cameras, but privacy advocates are leery of their ability to constantly monitor moving

objects, including cars on the ground.

"It's that persistent surveillance that raises all the privacy concerns," said David Roch, senior staff attorney with the Maryland branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. "It's important to remember that Maryland is not the battlefield and we are not the enemy."

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MILITARY

Air Force Cross awarded to pararescueman for bravery

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A pararescueman was awarded the Air Force Cross for his bravery in Afghanistan.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James presented the medal Wednesday to Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz during a ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., the home of Air Force Special Operations Command.

Only five other servicemembers have received the Air Force Cross since 9/11. It ranks second to the Medal of Honor among awards for valor that airmen can earn.

A member of 56th Rescue Squadron at Royal Air Force, Lakenheath, England, Ruiz was deployed to Afghanistan last year as part of the 22nd Expeditionary Special Tactics Squadron.

On Dec. 10, 2013, he was working with U.S. Army Special Forces in Kandahar province when he and two battle buddies were cut off from their teammates while moving through enemy compounds.

‘I didn’t really think, I reacted. Anytime something bad happens in my career, I just fall back on my training.’

Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz
on actions that earned him the Air Force Cross

After killing several insurgents at point-blank range, the three were pinned down in a courtyard by enemy gunfire and grenades. The two soldiers with Ruiz were seriously wounded and left immobile and exposed. Ruiz sprinted through gunfire to engage the enemy and defend his teammates, according to an AFSOC description of the battle.

With grenades exploding 15 feet from him, he kept firing at multiple enemy positions to prevent insurgents from overruning his wounded battle buddies. Ruiz fought off the Taliban until reinforcements arrived.

After receiving fire support,

with bullets still flying around him, Ruiz dragged the wounded soldiers out of harm’s way and administered life-saving first aid.

“I just wanted to make sure my guys didn’t get hurt any more than they already were,” Ruiz said at Hurlburt, according to an AFSOC news release. “I just wanted to do my job.”

James praised Ruiz for his actions.

“We reserve the Air Force Cross for those special few who exhibit unequalled courage and bravery despite overwhelming odds, and that’s exactly what [Ruiz] did,” she said during the ceremony, according to the news release.

Ruiz credits his training for enabling him to respond.

“I didn’t really think, I reacted,” Ruiz said, according to the news release. “Anytime something bad happens in my career, I just fall back on my training. It prepares us for what we can encounter when we are doing our work.”

Also attending the ceremony were two Special Forces sol-



CHRISTOPHER CALLAWAY/Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James pins the Air Force Cross on Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz at Hurlburt Field, Fla., on Wednesday.

diers whom Ruiz saved in the courtyard.

“I have a great deal of respect for what [Ruiz] and guys like him bring to the fight,” said one soldier, who was not identified in the news release. “It’s always good to know you have guys like that out there with you.”

Ruiz received a Bronze Star with “V” device for his bravery during another battle in Afghanistan just three months before the fight that earned him the Air

Force Cross. Over the course of a 13-hour engagement with insurgents in September 2013, Ruiz climbed a hillside and repeatedly exposed himself to hostile fire as he took on eight enemy fighting positions. He helped repel multiple attacks and contributed to more than 100 insurgent deaths, according to an Air Force description of the engagement.

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NATION

Data show many abused kids die after file opened

By HOLBROOK MOHR
AND GARANCE BURKE
The Associated Press

BUTTE, Mont. — At least 786 children died of abuse or neglect in the U.S. in a six-year span in plain view of child protection authorities — many of them beaten, starved or left alone to drown while agencies had good reason to know they were in danger, The Associated Press has found.

To determine that number, the AP canvassed the 50 states, the District of Columbia and branches of the military — circumventing a system that does a terrible job of accounting for child deaths. Many states struggled to provide numbers. Secrecy often prevailed.

Most of the 786 children whose cases were compiled by the AP were under the age of 4. They lost their lives even as authorities were investigating their families or providing some form of protective services because of previous instances of neglect or violence or other troubles in the home.

Take Mattisyn Blaz, a 2-month-old Montana girl who died when her father spiked her "like a football," in the words of a prosecutor.

Matthew Blaz was well-known

to child services personnel and police. Just two weeks after Mattisyn was born on June 25, 2013, he came home drunk, grabbed his wife by her hair and threw her to the kitchen floor while she clung to the newborn.

Jennifer Blaz said a child protective services worker visited the day after her husband's attack, spoke with her briefly and left. Her husband pleaded guilty to assault and was ordered by a judge to take anger management classes and stay away from his wife. Convinced he had changed, his wife allowed him to return to the home.

She said the next official contact between the family and Montana child services came more than six weeks later — the day of Mattisyn's funeral.

Many factors can contribute to the abuse dilemma nationwide: The child protective services system is plagued with worker shortages and a serious overload of cases. Budgets are tight, and nearly 40 percent of the 3 million child abuse and neglect complaints made annually to child protective services hotlines are "screened out" and never investigated.

Also, insufficient training for those who answer child abuse ho-

ttlines leads to reports being misclassified, sometimes with deadly consequences; a lack of a comprehensive national child welfare database allows some abusers to avoid detection by moving to different states; and a policy that promotes keeping families intact can play a major role in the number of deaths.

Because no single, complete set of data exists for the deaths of children who already were being overseen by child welfare caseworkers, the information compiled over the course of AP's eight-month investigation represents the most comprehensive statistics publicly available.

But the number of abuse and neglect fatalities where a prior open case existed at the time of death is undoubtedly much higher than the tally of 760.

States submit information on child abuse deaths to the federal government on a voluntary basis — some of it comprehensive, some of it inaccurate. Still, no state has ever been found in violation of disclosure requirements and federal grants have never been withheld, according to Catherine Nolan, who directs the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Execs charged in W.Va. river spill

The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — When state inspectors arrived at Freedom Industries asking about a license smell enveloping West Virginia's capital city, the point person at the tank farm, Dennis P. Farrell, told them he knew nothing about a chemical leak.

He seemed to brush off cause for concern over the odor in January. It was the industry's busy season, after all, with chemical ships coming and going.

On a brief tour, inspectors and Farrell quickly saw what was already contaminating 300,000 square feet of chemicals, 4 inches deep in some spots, had oozed out of an old aboveground tank, through a dilapidated, cracked containment wall and into the Elk River below. The

company tried to stop the flow by tossing a cinder block on top of one bag of absorbent material, which failed, according to state email records.

Almost a year later, Farrell, three other former Freedom executives, the company itself and two other employees are facing criminal charges in the spill. Ex-president Gary Southern and former joint owners William E. Tis, Charles E. Herzog and Farrell face Clean Water Act charges for their roles with Freedom. During their time as Freedom corporate officers, Farrell, Tis, Herzog and Southern "approved funding only for those projects that would result in increased business revenue for Freedom or that were necessary to make immediate repairs to equipment that was broken or about to break," the in-

dustrial said.

The men ignored or failed to fund other projects to repair, maintain and improve equipment and systems needed for compliance with environmental regulations, including addressing drainage problems in the containment area.

Southern's attorney, Robert Allen, said Wednesday that his client plans to plead not guilty and "vigorously fight the charges."

According to health officials, after the spill, more than 400 people were treated at hospitals for symptoms that matched what's expected from exposure to the chemical, known as MCHM.

Per state orders, Freedom tank farm was razed in October, including the leaky World War II-era tank with two holes, just a few millimeters each.



MICHAEL RUBINKAM/AP

Reading, Pa., City Councilman Jeff Waltman successfully fought to save the city's Christmas tree, a 50-foot Norway spruce residents compared to the spindly tree in "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Charlie Brown Christmas tree wins over Pa. town

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM
The Associated Press

READING, Pa. — Reading's official Christmas tree has brought the city plenty of grief. Good grief.

When the 50-foot Norway spruce went up last month, it drew immediate comparisons to the scraggly sapling in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Its giant bare spots and asymmetrical branches were no one's idea of Christmas tree perfection — especially in Pennsylvania, one of the nation's largest producers. Some residents and city officials called it an embarrassment and demanded it be replaced with a more suitable specimen.

Instead, Reading decided to embrace the Charlie Brown theme.

Workers wrapped a blue blanket around its base — a la Linus — and adorned it with a single red ball. The city announced a worldwide photo and essay contest, with winners to receive copies of the book version of the beloved TV special. And on Saturday, the public is invited to give the tree a makeover, just like the "Peanuts" gang surprised Charlie Brown by turning his puny pine into a trimmed, twinkling tannenbaum.

Turns out Reading's tree wasn't bad at all, really. It just needed a

little love.

"Christmas is so commercialized that we tend to forget what Christmas was used to be like," said Mayor Vaughn Spencer, channeling good of Charlie Brown himself. "Sometimes we have to keep things in perspective, and I think that's the lesson here."

Amy Johnson, the daughter of the late "Peanuts" creator Charles Schulz, said her father would be tickled that "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has made a real-world impact nearly a half-century after its release. "All he ever wanted to do with his strip was make people happy," she said. "And if he could bring the town together, that would make him very happy."

As generations of fans know, "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has the lovable loser picking a tree for the Christmas play. After he rescues a tiny sapling that's losing its needles, the other kids scold him for his ineptitude and laugh derisively at the tree. Then Linus tells the biblical story of Jesus' birth, and the gang has a change of heart.

City Councilman Jeff Waltman said the conifer symbolizes Reading itself — full of potential and ready for transformation.

"This tree carries its own little spirit," he said. "It has its own little voice now."

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NATION

Sources link North Korea to Sony hack

By BERNARD CONDON, ERIC TUCKER and MAE ANDERSON
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A U.S. official says North Korea is linked to the unprecedented hack of Sony Pictures that exposed a trove of sensitive documents and escalated to threats of terrorism, driving the studio to cancel release of the movie "The Interview" believed to be the motive for the cyberattack.

The attack is possibly the costliest ever for a U.S. company, said Avivah Litan, a cybersecurity analyst at research firm Gartner. "This attack went to the heart and core of Sony's business and succeeded," she said. "We haven't seen any attack like this in the annals of U.S. breach history."

Federal investigators believe there is a connection between the Sony hack and the isolated communist nation, according to an official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to openly discuss an ongoing criminal case.

At a press conference Thursday, White House spokesman Josh Earnest declined to blame North Korea. Earnest said he doesn't want to get ahead of investigations by the Justice Department and the FBI.

North Korea has denounced "The Interview" but earlier this month said the hack might have been carried out by sympathizers. The movie features a pair of journalists played by James Franco and Seth Rogen who are asked by the CIA to assassinate North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un.

A besieged Sony on Wednesday canceled the Christmas Day release of the film, citing threats of violence by the hackers and decisions by the largest multiplex chains in North America to pull screenings. The hackers, who call themselves Guardians of Peace, had made threats of violence

reminiscent of Sept. 11, 2001, if movie theatres showed the film.

Sony later said it has "no further release plans for the film."

"We are deeply saddened at this brazen effort to suppress the distribution of a movie," Sony Pictures said in a statement.

National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said the U.S. government had no involvement in Sony's decision. She said artists and entertainers have the right to produce and distribute whatever content they want in the U.S.

John McCain, a Republican senator from Arizona, called Sony's decision to cancel the movie a "troubling precedent that will only empower and embolden bad actors to use cyber as an offensive weapon even more aggressively in the future."

How much the cyberattack will ultimately cost Sony is unclear. Sony faces trouble on several fronts after nearly four weeks since the hackers first crippled its computer systems and started dumping thousands of emails and private documents online.

In addition to vanishing box-office revenue from "The Interview," leaked documents could muck up production schedules, experts say. There will be the cost of defending the studio against lawsuits by ex-employees angry over leaked Social Security numbers and other personal information. And then there are actors who might decide to work at another studio.

Beyond the financial blow, some say the attack and Sony's capitulation has raised troubling questions about self-censorship and whether other studios and U.S. companies are now also vulnerable.

"Artistic freedom is at risk," said Efraim Levy, a senior financial analyst at research firm S&P Capital IQ. "Are we not going to put out movies that offend some constituencies?"

AAFES made the call in Sept. to not show the film

By ASHLEY ROWLAND
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Months before Sony scuttled the release of "The Interview," AAFES had already decided against showing the movie depicting the assassination of Kim Jong Un in any of its theaters.

But unlike Sony Pictures Entertainment, which announced Wednesday that it was pulling the movie because of threats to U.S. theaters, AAFES said it had decided not to show it because other films scheduled to be released around the same time are expected to have wider audience appeal.

"The decision was not related to political concerns about the content of the film," Army and Air Force Exchange Service

spokesman Chris Ward said in a statement to Stars and Stripes regarding the showing of the movie at its Pacific theaters.

The decision was made in September when AAFES confirmed other movies would be available, Ward said. AAFES has not received any command requests for the movie, he added.

Had Sony not decided this week to pull the movie, service members stationed in the Pacific would not have been able to see it. Ward said Sony had decided not to release the movie in Asia.

First-run movies that will be shown at Exchange theaters outside the U.S. from Dec. 17-31 are "The Hobbit," "Annie," "Night at the Museum," "Into the Woods," and "Unbroken."

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Possible damage to Sony

BOX OFFICE LOSSES

With a modest budget of about \$40 million, "The Interview" had been predicted to gross around \$30 million in its opening weekend. Doug Stone, president of film industry newsletter Box Office Analyst, forecast that Sony could have grossed \$120 million in U.S. and foreign box office revenue from the film. It has already spent tens of millions on marketing.

SCRIPT SPOILERS

A leaked script of the Sony's upcoming James Bond film "Spectre" led to an online frenzy of articles warning readers of "major spoilers."

Seth Shapiro, a professor at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts, thinks the potential damage from a hit to the blockbuster franchise is big. "How can they proceed if everyone in the audience has already read the script?" he said.

Others disagreed, noting that people flooded to movies like "Titanic" through everyone knew the ending.

FLEEING TALENT?

It's not yet clear if the leaks of sensitive emails will cause agents and top actors to think twice about working with Sony.

In the short term, some think it may

hurt because the massive leak hurts prestige and indicates Sony is not being run as well as it should, said Shapiro.

Others say business interests will trump ego.

LEGAL WOES

Earlier this week, four former employees sued Sony for not protecting their private information from hackers. The lawsuits seek class-action status on behalf of the nearly 50,000 Sony Pictures employees whose Social Security numbers and other private data was exposed.

Legal experts said the cases are likely just two of many that will be filed over the data breach.

SOURCE: The Associated Press



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PORTRAYING HEROES



Leonard van Oord takes his helmet off to listen for enemy movement while portraying a squad leader of the 106th Infantry Division as part of a re-enactment Saturday. The 106th fought in the same forest 70 years ago during the Battle of the Bulge.



Mike Struik, portraying a wounded U.S. soldier, lies in pain during a Battle of the Bulge re-enactment on Saturday.



Wesley van Reen displays his authentic looking cigarette case complete with a family photo, a '40s pin-up girl and homemade '40s replica cigarettes on Sunday.



Koen Monnickendam looks back at the line of foxholes he and other re-enactors occupied Monday while portraying the 106th Infantry Division in the very forest that unit fought in 70 years ago.



Dutch re-enactors, from left to right, Wesley van Reen, Rico Peters and Sjoerd Bijsterveld, warm up with small fires near their foxholes. They were portraying the 106th Infantry Division in the heights above St. Vith, Belgium.

Re-enactors aim to catch spirit of US WWII troops in Battle of Bulge

By JOSHUA L. DEMOTTS
Stars and Stripes

Pvt. Edwin Cotter kneels in the cold, wet mud of the Prümberg, a large hill above St. Vith, near the German border, catching his breath as snowflakes float to the ground blanketing the forest around him. Shovels rhythmically break ground and the barking commands of soldiers disturb the otherwise peaceful setting.

"Cotter!" ... schunk ... schunk ... "Use branches for cover, think about camouflage!" ... schunk ...

Soldiers with the 106th Infantry Division begin digging foxholes as they prepare to take their turn on the front lines in the Ardennes Forest. The date is Dec. 13, 2014, yet it feels and looks exactly as it must have 70 years ago when the U.S. and its allies were engaged in war against Nazi Germany. These soldiers are actually re-enactors, mostly from the Netherlands, who commit a lot of time and money to

portray World War II U.S. infantrymen.

‘Those people absolutely look like Americans 70 years ago; it’s amazing what they did out here.’

Herb Shearer
106th Infantry Division veteran of the Battle of the Bulge

According to Leonard van Oord, a 19-year-old World War II re-enactor, American Patrol maintains a high level of authenticity. Focusing on different units every year, the group studies each unit in depth, looking at everything from the uniforms worn to the unit's achievements and everything in between.

"We don't just want to look good or pose in a uniform," said van Oord. "We want to know the unit we portray and the history. We want to understand their living conditions."

This year, for the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, American Patrol teamed up with about five other groups to portray units from the U.S. 106th Infantry Division. According to Carl Wouters, the 106th Infantry Division Association's Belgium liaison, the actions of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne overshadowed those of the 106th ID, but St. Vith arguably was an equally important road junction that had great tactical importance for the Germans.

SEE PAGE 11

EUROPE

FROM PAGE 10

Despite being stretched too thin with little-to-no experience, the young men of the 106th, the last infantry division to be activated in World War II, truly lost their innocence overnight when the Germans attacked them on Dec. 16, 1944. Two of the division's three regiments were surrounded and completely cut off from supplies and reinforcements. After three days of holding out and taking mass casualties, both regimental commanders independently decided to surrender what was left of their regiments on Dec. 19, 1944.

"The actions of the division made it possible for the other units to move in from the rear, join the fight and plug the hole in the 'dam,'" Wouters said. "Against all odds, they put up one hell of a fight. For that, they deserve credit, praise and everlasting respect."

Paying respect and remembering are largely the reasons American Patrol members participate in these re-enactments.

"We do this to remember the people who liberated Western Europe 70 years ago, to make sure

they are not forgotten by current generations," van Oord. "They made great sacrifices, they came all the way from their farms in America to liberate us from German oppression and for that we are thankful."

'They would've been real good soldiers back in World War II; they would have. I'll never forget this.'

Sheaner
attending the
re-enactment
near St. Vith,
Belgium

the Bulge, Herb Sheaner Jr., 90, and Dick Lockhart, 91, came to the re-enactment site on Prümberg, where actual fighting had taken place, to see what the young re-enactors were doing.

They were here for the third annual Flag of Friendship Ceremony held in St. Vith on Sunday. The re-enactors also stood in formation, performed a 27-gun salute and carried flowers in the ceremony.

Sheaner and Lockhart saw the men in their foxholes and were given a tour of the headquarters, where they had coffee and talked with the re-enactor commanding officer before witnessing a mock battle with an advancing German unit.

According to Sheaner, the young re-enactors could've been his buddies 70 years ago at about the right ages and wearing the same clothing and gear.

"Those people absolutely look like Americans 70 years ago, it's amazing what they did out here," Sheaner said.

"They would've been real good soldiers back in World War II; they would have. I'll never forget this."

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The young men of American Patrol, a Dutch re-enactment group, listen to orders from their platoon leader on Sunday in the forest of Proemerberg, the large hill between St. Vith and Schonberg.



Herbert Sheaner visits the mostly Dutch World War II re-enactment groups that are portraying his unit, the 106th Infantry Division, on Monday. Sheaner fought there as a 20-year-old soldier in the Battle of the Bulge.



Dutch re-enactors portraying U.S. soldiers in the 106th Infantry Division march to the front lines above St. Vith on Saturday.



Re-enactors portray German forces on Monday as they fight re-enactors portraying American soldiers.



Leonard van Oord, portraying an American squad leader is taken captive by a man playing the role of a German soldier during a re-enactment.

INDEPENDENT NEWS FOR THE U.S. MILITARY COMMUNITY

Whenever They Fight and Wherever They Live

The first Stars and Stripes was printed during the Civil War, when a band of Union soldiers published a handful of editions.

During World War I, Stars and Stripes reappeared in Paris on February 8, 1918, to serve the doughboys of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), by order of General of the Armies John J. Pershing. An all-military staff produced it weekly until the war's end.

A second renaissance began on April 18, 1942, when a small group of servicemen began publishing a four-page weekly Stars and Stripes in London. They sold each copy for "tuppence" (about 5 cents) and in no time doubled their page count to eight pages, printing daily instead of weekly.

The first World War II edition of Stars and Stripes featured an interview with Gen. George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. Marshall quoted Gen. Pershing, World War I Commander of the AEF, who described Stars as a major factor in sustaining morale. Stars and Stripes later found a champion and protector in Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander and later president of the United States.

Eisenhower enforced a hands-off policy in regard to Stars and Stripes that continues to the present day.

Operations expanded, following GIs to the battlefield to bring them the news. During the war, Stars and Stripes published over 30

separate editions, running up to 24 pages per issue.

At one time, Stars and Stripes had some 25 printing locations in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. The Pacific edition was launched a week after VE day (Victory in Europe, May 8, 1945).

The war ended—but Stars and Stripes kept going. Its reporters and photographers continued to join American troops in the field, throughout the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, during the 1990s Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and in Bosnia and Kosovo.

From the 2003 outset of Operation Enduring Freedom, Stars and Stripes was there to report first-hand. The war in Afghanistan continues to receive steady coverage. And during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Stars reporters embedded with military units in Kuwait and Iraq, as well as on Navy ships in the region.

Stars and Stripes today is a multimedia news organization. The majority of Stars and Stripes unique reporting efforts is read now in digital form, either online at stripes.com or via mobile offerings for iPhone, Android and iPad, in over 200 countries around the world.

The print newspaper is still available for servicemembers, government civilians and their families in

Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific—and in contingency areas. Washington, D.C., hosts the Central office, where daily editions are transmitted to printers in Afghanistan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Djibouti, as well as in Germany, Italy, UK, Japan, and South Korea. Stars and Stripes also publishes several weeklies (Stripes Guam, Japan, Korea and Okinawa), designed to serve the

needs of their respective military communities.

A U.S. edition comprised exclusively of Stars and Stripes reports from around the world now serves stateside forces and veterans. The U.S. edition is published in partnership with commercial newspaper publishers who serve communities with large military populations.



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NATION

Congress not likely to stop new Cuba policy

By DEB RIECHMANN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lack of unanimity from both political parties toward President Barack Obama's sudden move to re-establish ties with Cuba complicates any congressional effort to scuttle the most significant change in U.S. policy toward the communist island in 50-plus years.

His initiative faces some strong resistance among lawmakers, with criticism coming mostly from Republicans, who say the new policy rewards Cuba's decades-long policies of repression, human rights abuses and aggression. Some prominent Democrats voiced opposition, too.

Opponents spoke of holding

up money to set up a full-service U.S. embassy in Havana, blocking Obama's nominee as ambassador to Cuba or other such steps. But even if they were to pass sweeping legislation to stop what Obama wants to do, he could veto it and they are unlikely to muster the two-thirds majority to override a veto.

The Republicans will control both the Senate and the House come Jan. 6, but they will face pressure from businesses and the farm industry — eyeing opportunities for commerce in Cuba — not to stand in the way of expanded ties.

The U.S. declared an embargo on most exports to Cuba in October 1960 and severed diplomatic relations in January 1961.

Three months later, Fidel Castro declared Cuba a socialist state — just a day before the doomed, U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion meant to topple him. After Castro became ill in 2006, his brother, Raul, took charge of the nation, less than 100 miles off the southern coast of Florida.

Now Obama says he will ease economic and travel restrictions on Cuba and work with Congress to end the trade embargo. This came after Cuba released American Alan Gross, who had been imprisoned for five years, and a Cuban who had spied for the U.S. In exchange, the U.S. freed three Cubans jailed in Florida.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, one of three lawmakers who flew to Cuba before dawn to escort Gross home,

praised Obama's move.

Leahy, the top Democrat on the committee that oversees foreign aid, said that over the years, he's heard members of Congress tell presidents, "Hang tough on Cuba and those Castros will be out of there any day now."

"That was said to President Kennedy, President Johnson, President Nixon, President Ford, President Carter — you see what I'm driving at," Leahy said. "The fact is they are there. The fact is, Cuba is still there."

Another Democrat, New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez, the outgoing chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, voiced opposition to the new Cuban policy.

Menendez, whose parents are Cuban immigrants, said Cuba is

not going to reform just because Obama believes that if he extends his hand in peace, the Castro brothers suddenly will "unclechn their fists."

Spills were evident on the Republican side, too.

Sen. Marco Rubio, a Cuban-American and potential presidential candidate, said the new U.S. policy would give Cuba a needed economic lift — something "the Castro regime needs to become permanent fixtures in Cuba for generations to come."

More telling for the outlook in the new Congress was the response of Sen. Bob Corker, the incoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who was cautious but not critical of Obama's action.

Cuban cigars to have easier path in coming to America

By LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — For cigar aficionados around the country, the warming of U.S.-Cuba relations might best be celebrated beside the smoky glow of a Cohiba. And yet stateside, that still won't be easy to do for some time.

On Wednesday, the White House announced that it would reestablish ties with Cuba. In addition to opening a U.S. embassy in Havana, the government will ease travel restrictions for Americans to the island nation. Commercial imports of Cuban goods, however, are still frozen despite the diplomatic thaw.

In 2013, the global retail value of the cigar market was more than \$23 billion, according to data from Euromonitor International. And Corporacion Habanos, an iconic producer of Cuban cigar brands like Cohiba, was the 18th-largest cigar company in the world last year, selling more than 215 million units.

For those cigars to make their way into American shops, Con-

gress would need to lift the trade embargo on Cuba, which is codified in U.S. law and beyond the scope of the executive power that Obama exercised on Wednesday. The president did, however, say in a news conference that he hopes his actions will lead to "a serious debate about lifting the embargo," and that "increased commerce is good for Americans and Cubans."

While the sale of Cuban cigars is less than imminent, small quantities will soon be easier to bring into the United States for personal use. Speaking on background, a Treasury Department official said rules on enforcement of Cuban cigar importation would ease, according to the travel changes announced by Obama.

To this point, the importation of tobacco from Cuba was not previously authorized, even for the small group of citizens who were permitted to travel between the two countries. Once the president's changes take effect in the coming weeks, however, authorized American travelers will now be allowed to import up to



RAMON ESPINOSA/AP

A worker selects cigars at the H. Upmann cigar factory in March 2013.

\$100 of Cuban alcohol or tobacco products.

Due to decades of embargo, cigar makers have long looked for other ways to satisfy Americans'

taste for the smoky contraband. In the United States, Swisher Sweets is currently the most popular brand, with a market share of 31 percent. But many brands cre-

ate cigars that are "Cuban style" or "made with Cuban seed," in an effort to skirt the illegality of importing cigars produced on the island.

Gitmo: Despite policy, official says base is 'maintaining current operations'

FROM FRONT PAGE

The Pentagon spokesman for U.S. military activity in Latin America and the Caribbean said the administration was still committed to closing the base's war-on-terror prison, which currently hold 136 foreign captives there in an operation staffed by about 2,000 U.S. troops and civilians on temporary duties.

But the U.S. military uses Guantanamo for other purposes. Its airstrip has been a launch pad for drug-interdiction and

humanitarian-relief missions in the Caribbean. U.S. Coast Guard and Navy vessels pass through on resupply missions. Just this past weekend, the Coast Guard Cutter Tampa was in port.

"As of today, the Defense Department is maintaining current operations and policies throughout the region," said Army Lt. Col. Myles B. Caggins III, the spokesman. "We continue to support the president's goal of reducing the detainee population at Guantanamo through transfers

and prosecutions."

Beyond the Detention Center Zone, there was no hint this week of the coming upheaval in U.S.-Cuban relations on the base, which resembles small-town America. It has a church, a McDonald's, a scruffy golf course, schools for sailors' children, and every morning at 8 a.m., the blare of the Star Spangled Banner.

At the U.S. Navy's base radio station, called Radio Gitmo, the shelves were bulging with fresh stocks of "Rockin' in Fidel's Back-

yard" T-shirts, Castro bobble head dolls and other souvenirs. It was also offering a new item: \$5 Santa caps in advance of the holiday season.

During the height of the Cold War, tens of thousands of troops served at Guantanamo with munitions hidden in hillside bunkers and U.S. Marines guarding a tense frontier — as portrayed in the Hollywood hit "A Few Good Men," starring Jack Nicholson, Tom Cruise and Demi Moore.

The 17.4-mile fence line was

known as the Cactus Curtain. Then in 1999, U.S. President Bill Clinton had the Marines remove the minefield, heralding a new era. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, successive Guantanamo base commanders, Navy captains, described the U.S.-Cuban relationship along the minefield as "benign."

Now, only the occasional sound of Cuban mines popping off in the heat or by something rustling in the minefield remind of the dangers of the frontier.

WORLD

Putin vows economy fix

By LAURA MILLS
AND VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed Thursday to fix Russia's economic woes within two years, voicing confidence that the plummeting ruble will recover and promising to diversify Russia's gas-dependent economy.

Speaking with strong emotion and looking confident, Putin also displayed a defiant stance toward the West, which he insisted was still trying to destroy Russia.

Putin acknowledged that Western economic sanctions over Russia's actions in Ukraine were just one factor behind Russia's economic crisis, accounting for roughly 25 to 30 percent of the ruble's troubles. He said a key reason for the currency's recent fall was the nation's failure to ease its overwhelming dependence on oil and gas exports.

As Putin spoke, the Russian currency was trading at 61 rubles to

the dollar. That was slightly lower than last night but up 12 percent from the historic low of 80 to the dollar that it hit earlier this week.

The Russian leader sought to soothe market fears that the government could use administrative controls, such as obliging exporters to sell their currency earnings, to help stabilize the ruble.

Putin said the nation's currency reserves are sufficient to keep the economy in stable condition, adding that the Central Bank shouldn't aimlessly "burn" its \$419 billion in reserves.

"Our economy will overcome the current situation. How much time will be needed for that? Under the most unfavorable circumstances I think it will take about two years," he said.

Putin struck a defiant note against America and the European Union, saying that sanctions slapped against Russia after it seized the Black Sea region of Crimea in March were part of a

historical campaign to weaken Russia. He accused the West of trying to infringe on Russia's sovereignty, adding that the Ukrainian crisis was just a pretext for Western action.

"Sometimes I think, maybe they'll let the bear eat berries and honey in the forest, maybe they will leave it in peace," said Putin, referring to Russia's famed symbol. "They will not. Because they will always try to put him on a chain, and as soon as they succeed in doing so they tear out his fangs and his claws."

He said by fangs and claws he meant Russia's nuclear weapons, adding that the West wants to weaken Russia to win control over its rich natural resources.

"Once they've taken out his claws and his fangs, then the bear is no longer necessary. He'll become a stuffed animal," he said.

"The issue is not Crimea, the issue is that we are protecting our sovereignty and our right to exist."



PAVEL GOLOVKIN/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday during his annual news conference in Moscow that the economy will rebound and the ruble will stabilize.

Putin defended Russia's increased military activities, including Baltic flights that NATO said put civilian flights at risk, as a necessary response to what he described as aggressive Western action.

Despite his anti-Western rhetoric, Putin urged a political solution for the crisis in Ukraine, where

pro-Russian insurgents have been battling Ukrainian government troops since April, leaving 4,700 people dead.

Putin also held out hope for normalizing ties with the West, saying that Russia still hopes to expand its gas supplies to southern Europe using a prospective gas hub on Turkey's border with Greece.

People attend the funeral Wednesday of a student killed in Tuesday's Taliban attack on a Peshawar, Pakistan, school. A three-day official mourning period started Wednesday, a day after seven Taliban gunmen killed 148 people.

MOHAMMAD SAJJAD/AP



Pakistan buries school victims

The Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — As they buried their children Wednesday, the families spoke of their dreams. One boy had just gotten high marks on his midterm and hoped to become a pilot. A 13-year-old wanted to become a doctor. Another kid just loved playing video games with his cousins.

At cemeteries across the Pakistani city of Peshawar, families lowered the rough wooden coffins of young boys and their teachers into the cold ground and gathered under funeral tents or at home, trying to comprehend the militant attack a day earlier on a school that killed 148 people, almost all of them young students.

The Pakistani government and military vowed a stepped up campaign aimed at rooting out militant strongholds in the country's 30 border regions along the border with Afghanistan. In a sign of how deeply the attack shook Pakistan, the head of the military flew to Kabul and sought help from the Afghan government — with Islamabad has long had a tense relationship — against militant commanders behind the attack, a Pakistani military official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of

anonymity.

In downtown Peshawar, the family of Shyer Khan, a 14-year-old student killed on Tuesday, gathered to comfort his father, who was too overwhelmed by grief to talk. Shyer's older brother, Muneeb, was in the auditorium when gunmen burst through the doors Tuesday morning, took the stage and began shooting randomly. He fell to the floor and pretended to be dead.

"There was so much bloodshed," Muneeb said softly. "I closed my eyes and lay on the floor for an hour."

When the militants moved on to other parts of the school, he escaped. His younger brother, however, was in a nearby classroom and was killed. At the gathering in the Khans' home, his family spoke of how Shyer was a fan of video games like "Call of Duty" and teasing his sisters.

The Pakistani Taliban, which has waged an insurrection against the government for a decade, claimed responsibility for the attack. The group says it was seeking revenge for a military assault launched in June in North Waziristan.

Pakistan has often been accused by Afghanistan of tolerating or protecting Afghan Taliban or other militants, while only trying to crack down on militants

who attack Pakistani targets.

But in the wake of Tuesday's bloodshed, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif used his strongest language yet vowing there will be no discrimination between "good or bad Taliban."

"We will continue this war until even a single terrorist is not left on our soil," he said.

In Peshawar, stunned people held candlelight vigils in solidarity with the Peshawar victims.

In Peshawar, families were simply trying to cope. The army-run school was well respected in the city, and many parents sent their children there in hopes of a good education.

"My son was a brilliant student," Haji Dost Muhammad said. His son Asad was shot in the back and killed, the family learned. He "wanted to be a pilot," his father said, "but his soul flew from his body before he could fly a plane."

Another father on Wednesday buried his son, Muhammad Harris, 13, in the Peshawar suburbs. The boy dreamed of becoming a doctor, said Gulam ud Din, a retired military man.

He pointed toward the fresh grave. "But today I buried both the body of my son and his dream here in this graveyard."

Siege a 'horrific wake-up call' for Australia

The Associated Press

SYDNEY — Australia's prime minister said Thursday that a deadly siege in a Sydney cafe may have been preventable, as the chorus of critics demanding to know why the gunman was out on bail despite facing a string of violent charges grew louder.

Man Haron Monis, 50, an Iranian-born, self-styled cleric with a lengthy criminal history, burst into a downtown Sydney cafe on Monday wielding a shotgun, taking 17 people hostage. The siege ended 16 hours later when police stormed into the cafe to free the captives, two of whom were killed in a barrage of gunfire, along with Monis.

"This has been a horrific wake-up call," Prime Minister Tony Abbott told Macquarie Radio. "This was an atrocity — it may well have been a preventable atrocity, and that's why this swift and thorough review is so important."

Court documents detail Monis' long history with the law. In 2011, Nolen Hayson Pal — his ex-partner and mother of their two sons — told police Monis had threatened her life. He was subsequently charged with stalking and intimidation intending to cause fear of physical or mental harm.

Pal testified in January 2012 that Monis said to her, "If I don't get to see the boys more than I am seeing them now, I'll make sure you pay for it — even if it means I have to shoot you."

Monis was ultimately found not guilty of the charge. A year later, Pal was stabbed to death and set on fire.

Police charged Monis' then-partner, Amirah Droudis, with Pal's murder, and charged Monis as an accessory. Both were out on bail on the charges when Monis launched his siege on the cafe. He was also facing 40 charges of sexual assault, and had been granted bail on those charges as well.

Monis was convicted and sentenced last year to 300 hours of community service for sending what a judge called "grossly offensive" letters to families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan from 2007-09.

Three days before he began his siege, Australia's highest court refused to hear his appeal of the convictions for sending the letters. The next business day, Monis walked into the Lindt Chocolate Cafe, a short stroll from the courtroom where the ruling was delivered.



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EUROPE



ANTHONY FAIOLA/The Washington Post

Earlier this month, promotional signs appeared advertising luxury vacation apartments being constructed in Prora, Germany. A group of investors are transforming the seaside town on the site of the Strength Through Joy resort, a Nazi vacation destination that was never fully realized.

Hitler's vacation paradise is reinvented as luxury condos

By ANTHONY FAIOLA
The Washington Post

PRORA, Germany — Built by the Third Reich in the run-up to World War II, the Strength Through Joy resort was a Nazi vision of tourism's future. Happy, healthy Aryans would stay and play at the 10,000-room complex on the Baltic Sea, eating, swimming and even bowling for the Führer. Think Hitler's Cancun.

But 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the complex nicknamed the Colossus of Prora is part of a growing debate in modern Germany that pits commercialism against Vergangenheitsbewältigung — or the German word for how the country should come to terms with its dark past.

Idyllic blocks of six-story buildings stretching for 2.8 miles went up before World War II slowed construction, leaving an unfinished hulk that was later retrofitted into training grounds and housing for East German soldiers. But a group of investors in this seaside town is now doing what the Nazis never could: realizing the site's final stage of transformation into a vacation wonderland. Large parts of the complex are being gutted and rebuilt into developments, including one called "New Prora" that will house luxury beachfront condominiums — half of which have been sold — as well as an upscale hotel and spa.

It's not just the cashing in on a major Nazi landmark that troubles opponents. In a sense, some argue, the renovation also is fulfilling the Third Reich's initial plan to turn the colossus into a massive tourism hub. In promotional material, developers are hailing the original project — whose design is believed to have been chosen by Hitler — as a "world-famous monument" recognized in its day

Colossus of Prora

The Colossus of Prora was mass-terminated in the 1930s by Robert Ley, a top Hitler lieutenant. He led the Strength Through Joy effort, which was meant to be a cornerstone of the resort here.

At Prora, thousands of small, heated rooms facing the sea would recharge the minds and bodies of the German masses, preparing vacationers for life as the masters of Europe. They would enjoy communal meals and common entertainment areas.

Yet the colossus never lived up to Hitler's ambitions. Despite the importation of forced Polish labor to help build it faster, the resort became a low priority as World War II raged. It was left unfinished at the war's end and was briefly claimed by the Red Army before being finished into barracks for the East German military.

After reunification, historic preservationists and other government officials made determinations that the colossus was too expensive and architecturally significant to tear down. So the government sold its various blocks to different developers. A youth hostel opened in part of the complex in 2011. But the complex is now in the midst of a full-blown redevelopment, with the first owners of luxury holiday homes moving in over the summer.

— Anthony Faiola

for "award-winning architecture." Nevertheless, critics say, their plans also may wash away many of the elements that provided the reason for preserving the colossus in the first place.

"These are not harmless buildings," said J.Rostock, co-founder for the Prora documentation center. "The original purpose for Hitler was the construction of (a resort) in preparation for the war to come. This way of dealing with the building trivializes it and affirms the Nazi regime."

The facades of some blocks, for instance, are being brightened by dozens of quaint sea-facing balconies, changing the nature of the imposing, austere architecture that stood as a monument to insatiable militarism. In addition, the one documentation center at the site explaining the Big Brother-esque Strength Through Joy program — a Nazi effort to provide affordable fun to workers living the National Socialist dream — may be moved to the fringes of the complex and away from moneyed vacationers or, some fear, abandoned altogether.

Without doubt, recriminations of the Third Reich are far and wide in modern Germany, with war-era crime history taught from elementary school onward and a pacifist national identity built largely on a rejection of the past. But the Prora project is highlighting the always-thorny question here of how to deal with the most tangible relic of Germany's troubled past: Nazi architecture.

In the years after the war, some Nazi-era structures were preserved as monumental testaments to an inhuman regime, while others were pragmatically transformed into offices, army barracks and spaces for other uses. The Berlin stadium built for Hitler's 1936 Olympic Games is now home to the Hertha Berlin soccer club. The Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus — former home of Hermann Göring's Ministry of Aviation — now houses a branch of Germany's Finance Ministry.

Yet opponents in some circles — particularly historians and Jewish groups — are growing increasingly uncomfortable with projects that smack too much of commercialization or appear to slight history.

Anti-Islamist rallies here amid immigrant backlash

By LEON MANGASARIAN
Bloomberg News

DRESDEN — An anti-Islamist group drew the biggest crowd ever for one of its rallies, even as Germany's leaders urged people not to participate in a movement that has gained in strength since starting two months ago.

Police estimated that 15,000 protesters took part in Monday night's rally and march in the eastern city of Dresden, with another 5,500 attending a demonstration against the group.

"We don't want radical Islamists here," Thomas Schmidt, 53, said at the rally, a German flag wrapped around his shoulders. "People keep trying to brand us as Nazis — but we're not Nazis. We're just worried citizens."

The organizers, who call themselves Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West, or Pegida, demand stricter immigration laws, resistance to "violent, misogynistic political ideology," and the protection of Christianity's "Western culture." There have been similar, smaller protests in cities such as Düsseldorf in past weeks.

Pegida is part of a wave of anti-immigrant groups sweeping Europe that established parties in countries such as Britain, France and Sweden find difficult to counter. While Pegida isn't a party, it follows election successes this year of the anti-euro Alternative for Germany, or AfD, that's critical of migrants and is taking voters from Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and her former Free Democrat allies.

"Pegida is a diffuse movement based on fear; I think it will gain more support," Joachim Scharfe, 57, a church employee, said at Monday's counterdemonstration outside the city's 18th century Hofkirche cathedral. "Most Pegida backers aren't neo-Nazis — they're people looking for simple answers."

The number of refugees pouring into Germany has increased almost 60 percent this year, with the German government estimating that 200,000 will enter the country in 2014. Last year, Germany surpassed the U.S. as the top destination globally for refugees, when 127,000 people applied for asylum in the country.

"Al! Baba and the 40 Dr Deakers — deport them immediately," read one sign held up by two men on the edge of Dresden's historic center last night. The crowd frequently broke into chants of the slogan used by those who took to the streets to topple the East German government in 1989: "We are the People!" The crowd crisscrossed television and newspaper coverage of the movement with chants of "Media Lies!"

Headed by Lutz Bachmann, 41, an advertising agency and Internet entrepreneur, Pegida relies on social media including Facebook where its page has more than 42,000 "Likes." "We are strictly not against Islam but rather against Islamists and Islamization," Bachmann told the Junge Freiheit newspaper. "Pegida consistently rejects violence."

“We don't want radical Islamists here. People keep trying to brand us as Nazis — but we're not Nazis. We're just worried citizens.”

Thomas Schmidt
Patriotic Europeans Against
the Islamization of the West

The group has drawn scorn from German political leaders. Ralf Jaeger — the Social Democratic Interior Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, the country's most populous state — said "neo-Nazis" stand in the way. Pegida, Merkel warned, the protests can't be used to push an agenda against refugees.

"In Germany, we have a right to demonstrate, but there is no room for incitement and slander against people who have come to us from other countries," Merkel said Monday in Berlin. "Therefore we have to ensure that such events aren't exploited by their initiators."

There are about 4 million Muslims in Germany, which has a total population of 81 million, according to the Central Council of Muslims in Germany's website. A poll by public broadcaster ZDF published last week showed 25 percent of Germans think foreigners bring advantages, 24 percent see their bringing disadvantages and 15 percent saying the pluses and minuses of foreign residents balance out.

The number of Germans in far-right parties fell by 700 to 21,700 from 2011 to 2013, according to the Verfassungsschutz, Germany's domestic security agency. Yet several high-profile institutions have been targeted this year in attacks claimed by neo-Nazis.

Three firebombing attempts have taken place in Berlin since August on the Reichstag which houses parliament, a parliament office building and the headquarters of Merkel's CDU, according to German news agency DPA. In all three attacks, which didn't cause any damage, far-right propaganda or a letter claiming responsibility was left at the scene.

Three burned down in 2011 as housing for asylum seekers were also burned on Dec. 11 in the Bavarian town of Vörra, state Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said in a radio interview.

Backers of Salafism and radical Islamism have been active in Germany, according to the Federal Interior Ministry. Salafists have also been involved in clashes. Kurds demonstrating against Islamic State in Hamburg in October battled radical Islamists for three consecutive nights as tensions over fighting in Syria spilled into Germany.

FAITH



“The people who come in here are wonderful — you can’t judge people. You have to remember that any of us could be in their shoes. All I know is that everyone here has been good to me and they loved my wife.”

BY COLETTA M. JENKINS
Akron Beacon Journal

Angelo Antognoli’s heart for people is shown in his concern for the hundreds of people who come to the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center twice a week for hot meals.

“To be honest, it benefits me more than the people I’m serving. I don’t know what I would do with myself, if I didn’t have this,” said Antognoli, 83. “The people who come in here are wonderful — you can’t judge people. You have to remember that any of us could be in their shoes. All I know is that everyone here has been good to me and they loved my wife.”

Antognoli and his late wife, Sally, began volunteering at the soup kitchen more than 20 years ago. When she died in January, he decided to continue the mission they started together at Gennesaret: showing the love of Christ by serving people in need.

Gennesaret, an all-volunteer charity that is managed by a board of directors, provides long-term housing for homeless two-parent families in Summit County, Ohio, and free hot meals and groceries every Tuesday and Saturday to needy families and individuals at its nutritional center in Akron.

The center, formerly an automotive shop, was renovated four years ago through a \$350,000 donation in labor and materials from Testa Cos. and several of its subcontractors. Antognoli, whose late son, Anthony, worked for Testa, was instrumental in connecting Testa and the nonprofit



PHOTOS BY KAREN SCHIELY, AKRON BEACON JOURNAL/TNS

Joe Payne, left, Joel Testa and Paul Testa of Testa Builders serve food at the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center. The Testas have donated generously to the center, which serves needy families and individuals.

Upper left: Angelo Antognoli of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, holds an apron signed by people he has served at the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center in November in Akron, Ohio. He has volunteered at the center for several years.

A mission to serve

Spirit of compassion fills automotive-shop-turned-soup-kitchen

Gennesaret.

“I had known [CEO] Paul [Testa] for years. I met him years ago when working construction. He was just starting out as a builder,” Antognoli said. “Because I knew he was a man who likes to give back, I told Tony to ask him if he would help. The building was a mess. It was a major undertaking.”

When asked, Testa agreed to help because he was inspired by Gennesaret’s mission and the fact that the nonprofit is funded entirely through grants and individual donations. At the root of his altruism is his Christian faith. His real estate, construction and development company added a philanthropic arm in 1996 called “Operation Dreams Come True” to help families and organizations in need.

“God has been good to us, and we want to make a difference. When

you’re blessed, you want to be a blessing to others,” Paul Testa said. “I’m a sinner, and I want to do what I can to make up for it. And, fortunately, we work with some subcontractors who like to give back to the community, too. Getting this place renovated was a team effort.”

The renovation, practically a complete interior rebuild, was finished just before Gennesaret’s annual “Home Run for the Homeless” in 2010. The annual race, which attracts thousands of runners and walkers on Thanksgiving morning, is the sole fundraiser to benefit Gennesaret’s mission throughout the year.

“We’re just people trying to help people. We appreciate everything that anyone can do to help us meet the needs of the homeless in our community. It’s people like Angelo and the Testas

that make what we do possible,” said Bob Dirgo, president of Gennesaret’s board. “I can’t say enough about the humility of the people who volunteer. They don’t look for credit; they do it because they care about people and they do it quietly. It’s so inspiring.”

Dirgo and his wife, Mary, founded Gennesaret in 1986.

The couple, along with more than 300 volunteers that include daughters Swati, 13, and Kajal, 11, work year-round to provide a safe place that is responsive to the needs of the area’s homeless.

“It’s all about treating people the way you want to be treated,” said Antognoli. “People deserve to be treated with respect no matter where they are in life. That’s what happens here; we all respect each other and care for each other.”

FACES



Parting gifts

Richard Armitage keeps treasures from his role in last 'Hobbit' film

By SHARON EBERSON
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Hundreds of questions with #AskThorin were waiting when the King under the Mountain was ready. Richard Armitage, the actor who portrays Dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield in "The Hobbit" trilogy, jumped in to the live Twitter event recently and provided 20 answers, sharing his dislike of face glue and how much he'll miss stunts that require "hanging on a wire."

Minutes after the session and a few hours before the Los Angeles premiere of "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," Armitage was on the phone answering more questions, such as, "Did you get anything from the set when filming came to an end?"

The man who owns a well-used first edition of "The Lord of the Rings" as Thorin: "I was given my sword, Orcrist, the actual sword that I fought with that still has my prints on the hilt, and the oaken shield and the map (for the journey to the Lonely Mountain) and the key. The map was one of those props I used every day and I always had it inside my costume, so it's got my sweat on it and my blood — fake blood, that is," he added.

The 6-foot-2 England-born, New York-based actor portrayed the diminutive Thorin through three films, the first released in 2012. "The Hobbit" series has catapulted him from a familiar face on BBC TV dramas to the kind of recognition that hashtags are made of.

Armitage, 43, describes himself as a "moody actor" in his Twitter profile.

"It's true, it's true," he said with a chuckle, though in truth, he is a charming, engaged interviewee.

"I joined (Twitter) on my birthday (in August) and I sort of dived right in. It's been really fulfilling to engage with fans and show a side of myself that they would normally not see through my work, because I tend to take on quite serious, dark characters."

Thorin is that — and then some. In the "Hobbit" finale, the prickly leader descends into a madness that sees him choosing war over honor and duty. The films were not shot in chronological order, Armitage said, which was helpful in establishing the complexities of Thorin that bring him to this disagreeable state.

"One of the choices was to try and give him a sense of schizophrenia, where you really didn't know who he was going to be in any one scene," Armitage said. "I remember mak-

ing notes about the dragon sickness, which he thought was empowering and gave him like a life force but is, in a way, like drug or alcohol addiction can be. For the moment, when you get your fix, you're like a superhero. But there's a flip side where it takes a toll on your body and your mind."

Speaking directly about Thorin's fate is a no-no for the actor, but it is not a spoiler to say that the Dwarf king grasps his opportunities for reconciliations and redemption.

"We really had to care about him as that part of the story draws to an end. And at the same time, I didn't want to soften him in any way. That's a risk, the audience really disliking him at times ... I, too, felt there were moments I really didn't agree with his choices. It was fun to play a character like that who we knew could come back, and we had to see glimpses of that humanity in him."

Richard Armitage stars as Thorin in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies." Armitage says he still has his sword, Orcrist, "the actual sword that I fought with that still has my prints on the hilt."

WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Duggars patriarch says petition to cancel show is only giving them more exposure

From wire reports

A petition urging TLC to cancel "19 Kids and Counting" over the political views of the Duggar family "won't succeed," according to family patriarch Jim Bob Duggar. In fact, he said recently, all of the attention around the effort is working in the family's favor, giving the Duggars even more exposure.

The petition, which currently has more than 180,000 signatures, began as a response to the

family's recent comments against LGBT rights. It gained traction quickly and drew a lot of attention to some of the family's recent activism.

But Jim Bob Duggar probably has good reason not to be worried about the petition: The effort to raise awareness about the family's political views prompted its conservative supporters to launch a counter campaign, urging TLC to keep the show. A "Defend the Duggars" petition

on LifeSiteNews currently has almost 210,000 signatures — more than the petition telling TLC to scrap the popular series.

In a speech to the Booster Banquet at Hannibal-LaGrange University late last month, Duggar said: "Our show is the No. 1 show on TLC. We love everybody. It's a small group creating this fuss. All it has done is give us more exposure. We've gained 50,000 Facebook fans last week."

Actress Diane Guerrero writing memoir

Through her own story, Diane Guerrero wants to change the lives of others. Henry Holt and Company announced Thursday that the Colombian-American actress is working on a memoir scheduled for early 2016.

The book is called "In the Country We Love," and will tell of her family's ordeal when her

parents and older brother were taken from their home in Boston and deported to Colombia in 2000. Guerrero was 14 at the time and continued to live in the U.S., attending the Boston Arts Academy high school. She now volunteers for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, which advocates for immigrants' rights.

According to Holt, Guerrero will "cast a much-needed light" on the fears of deportation faced by many immigrant families.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Video helps police recover stolen wreath

RI WESTERLY — A Connecticut woman has been arrested after Westerly police say home-surveillance video caught her stealing a large wreath from someone else's front porch.

Police Chief Ed St. Clair said Christa Bradley, 46, of North Stonington, turned herself in Wednesday after police found the wreath hanging on her front door.

Homeowner Mary Sullivan put a video of the theft on Facebook that showed a woman walking up to the homemade wreath and walking off with it.

The video was reposted, and St. Clair says that led to the wreath.

Police disperse crowds at mall sneaker sale

OH TOLEDO — Police used pepper spray to disperse a crowd of people waiting in line for a shoe sale at an Ohio mall.

Multiple media reports said dozens of people were gathered before 6 a.m. Wednesday at Franklin Park Mall in Toledo to get tickets allowing them to buy the Nike Air Jordan shoe later this week.

Jeremiah Fletcher, 19, who was waiting in line, said police fired pepper spray three to four times.

Police hope sketch will help ID embalmed head

PA PITTSBURGH — Police in western Pennsylvania are hoping that a sketch artist's rendering will help them identify the embalmed head of a woman found in the woods last week.

Economy Borough police Chief Michael O'Brien tells The Associated Press that the drawing isn't completed, but will be released to media outlets once it is.

The head appears to be that of woman in her late 60s or early 70s, but police have no idea where it's from — especially since it was embalmed.

The chief says: "What's bizarre is not that we've found a head, it's that we've found a head that's embalmed."

Police are contacting medical schools to see if the head is from a cadaver, and are entering DNA into an FBI database for missing persons.

Measure aims to aid live music venues

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A San Francisco supervisor wants to make sure new housing developments in the city don't push out live music venues.

Supervisor London Breed unveiled legislation on Tuesday that would require that potential residents are notified that a live music club is nearby before they sign a lease or buy a unit. It would also prohibit neighbors from suing a permitted music venue on the grounds it's a nuisance if the venue is operating within the requirements of its permit.

Breed told the San Francisco Chronicle the clubs are part of the city's cultural history and bring significant economic benefits.

THE CENSUS

3,000

The number of rescue animals flown to better lives by retired businessman Jeff Bennett, a volunteer with **Pilots and Paws**. The South Carolina-based charity enlists small plane pilots to take animals from overcrowded shelters that have high euthanasia rates to foster homes, rescue groups and less-crowded shelters that don't kill them. Bennett estimates that he's flown about 1,100 hours in his small, four-seat Cessna aircraft since starting his volunteer work with the group six years ago. "Most of the time I do puppies and kittens, but I've done snakes, rats, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, snakes, tortoises, sea turtles, falcons, pigs and a kinkajou," he said.



JAMES QUIGG, DESERT DISPATCH/AP

Soldiers spread cheer at veterans home

Col. Kevin Jacobi, of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, greets Joseph Crowder, a resident of the Veterans Home of California in Barstow, Calif. Soldiers from Fort Irwin completed their march from the base to the retirement home on Tuesday, an annual tradition.

Police say mother gave young sons marijuana

MI CADILLAC — A woman from Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula faces child abuse and other charges after authorities say she gave her 10- and 12-year-old sons marijuana for medical reasons.

The 31-year-old woman from Mesick had a pretrial conference Tuesday in 84th District Court in Cadillac.

The Associated Press isn't naming the woman to avoid identifying the children.

Wexford County Prosecutor Anthony Badovinac told the Cadillac News the woman gave the 10-year-old marijuana to help with emotional issues and the 12-year-old marijuana to treat ADHD. Badovinac said the woman indicated she would rather have a child use marijuana than pills that were prescribed.

Guns OK'd at parades, other public events

ID COEUR D'ALENE — The Coeur d'Alene City Council says guns will now be permitted at public events such as parades.

The Coeur d'Alene Press reported the council unanimously made the change Tuesday night, changing an ordinance prohibiting guns within 1,000 feet of a parade. City Attorney Mike Gridley said the rule was originally created to avoid conflict in the community when the white supremacist group Aryan Nations was still headquartered in the region. The Aryan Nations compound closed after a lawsuit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center bankrupted the group in 2000.

Gridley noted that in 2008 the Idaho Legislature passed a law prohibiting cities from regulating the possession, transportation or carrying of firearms. Councilman Ron Edinger said that the

city could be at risk of a lawsuit if someone believed the local rule violated the newer state law.

Lottery to end Monopoly game as losses pile up

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A Monopoly-themed lottery game that never caught on with players is being canceled this month, but not before racking up about \$500,000 in losses for the Hoosier Lottery.

Lottery officials in the 23 states where the Monopoly Millionaires Club draw game is played announced this week that the game that launched in October would end Dec. 26.

Sales of the game have fallen well short of expectations, forcing states to pay extra to the Multi-State Lottery Association to make up the difference. Hoosier Lottery officials had lost nearly \$348,000 on the game through Nov. 30, and The (Munster) Times reported

that figure is expected to grow by the game's end.

The Hoosier Lottery sold just \$540,415 in \$5 Monopoly tickets through Nov. 30. The lottery sells about \$2 million in scratch-off tickets daily.

City kills measure to opt out of pot sales

AK ANCHORAGE — The Anchorage Assembly has rejected a proposed ordinance that would have banned legal marijuana sales within municipal boundaries.

The Alaska Dispatch News reported assembly members listened to four hours of testimony Tuesday and voted 9-2 to kill the measure proposed by Assemblywoman Amy Demboski.

Alaska voters approved legalization of recreational marijuana use last month.

From wire reports

BUSINESS/WEATHER

BlackBerry launches last-ditch Classic

By BARBARA ORTUTY
AND ROB GILLIES
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — BlackBerry is returning to its roots with a new phone that features a traditional keyboard at a time when rival Apple and Android phones — and most smartphone customers — have embraced touch screens.

With the Classic, BlackBerry is courting its core customer, the business user. The physical key-

board is something traditional BlackBerry users prefer because they find it easier to type with than touch screens. The company is also emphasizing battery life and security.

"A lot of people say the Classic is aiming for loyal customers. And that is true," CEO John Chen said at the gadget's launch event, tellingly held in New York City's Financial District. But he also invited people who haven't used a BlackBerry "especially people

who are young," to try the BlackBerry Classic.

Pioneered in 1999 with the launch of the RIM 950, BlackBerry changed the culture by allowing on-the-go businesspeople to access email wirelessly. Then came a new generation of competing smartphones, and suddenly the BlackBerry looked ancient. Apple showed that phones can handle much more than email and phone calls. BlackBerry was late in overhauling its operating

system to compete.

BlackBerry now holds a small fraction of the U.S. smartphone market after commanding a nearly 50 percent share as recently as 2009.

The company is trying to stay relevant on making hardware even as it tries to transform into an enterprise-security and consumer-software company. Whether the Classic will sell enough to keep it in the hardware business is unclear.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Dec. 19)	\$1.2637
Dollar buys (Dec. 19)	€0.7913
British pound (Dec. 19)	\$1.60
Japanese yen (Dec. 19)	¥114.00
South Korean won (Dec. 19)	₩1,074.00
Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound	\$1.5652/£0.6389
Canada (dollar)	1.1615
China (Yuan)	6.2179
Denmark (Krone)	6.8954
Egypt (Dinar)	7.1509
Euro	\$1.2777/€0.8145
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7569
Hungary (Forint)	256.37
Israel (Shekel)	3.9465
Japan (Yen)	119.19
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2925
Norway (Krone)	7.3830
Philippines (Peso)	44.71
Poland (Zloty)	3.476
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7537
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3148
South Korea (Won)	1,098.35
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9810
Thailand (Baht)	32.87
Turkey (New Lira)	2.1663

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), which keep your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to the dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	3.25
Discount rate	0.75
Federal funds market rate	0.12
3-month bill	0.04
30-year bond	2.73

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	\$2.857	\$3.066	\$3.254	\$3.722
Change in price	-12.5 cents	-11.9 cents	-12.1 cents	-11.6 cents
Netherlands	---	\$3.861	\$4.130	\$4.056
Change in price	---	-15.5 cents	-14.7 cents	-15.2 cents
U.K.	---	\$3.036	\$4.031	\$3.692
Change in price	---	-11.9 cents	-0.8 cents	-11.6 cents
Azores	---	---	\$3.686	---
Change in price	---	---	no change	---
Belgium	---	\$3.084	\$3.347	\$3.325
Change in price	---	no change	no change	no change
Turkey	---	---	\$3.822	\$4.229*
Change in price	---	---	no change	no change
Italy	\$4.230	---	---	\$4.271
Change in price	no change	---	---	no change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Unleaded	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	---	\$3.038	---	\$3.589
Change in price	---	-12.0 cents	---	-11.0 cents
Okinawa	\$2.819	---	\$3.509	---
Change in price	no change	---	-11.0 cents	---
South Korea	\$2.679	---	\$3.079	\$3.549
Change in price	-13.0 cents	---	-12.0 cents	-11.49 cents
Guam	\$2.669**	\$2.879	\$3.069	---
Change in price	-13.8 cents	-12.8 cents	-12.6 cents	---

* Diesel EFD ** Midgrade
For the week of Dec 20-26

MARKET WATCH

Dec. 17, 2014	
Dow Jones Industrials	288.00
	17,356.87
Nasdaq composite	96.48
	4,644.31
Standard & Poor's 500	40.15
	2,012.89
Russell	35.46
	1,174.84

WEATHER OUTLOOK



Friday's US temperatures

City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	City	Hi	Lo	Wthr
Ablene, Tex	48	35	Cld	Chatanooga	49	37	Cld	Fort Wayne	34	25	Cldy	Louisville	41	30	Cldy
Akron, Ohio	34	23	Cldy	Cheyenne	39	22	Cldy	Fresno	57	45	Cldy	Lubbock	46	29	Cldy
Albany, N.Y.	39	27	Cldy	Chicago	33	27	Cldy	Goodland	43	20	PCldy	Macon	61	44	Cldy
Albuquerque	45	24	Cir	Cincinnati	36	28	Cldy	Grand Junction	38	19	PCldy	Madison	31	22	PCldy
Allentown, Pa.	39	24	PCldy	Cleveland	34	27	Cldy	Great Rapids	35	25	Cldy	Medford	49	39	Cldy
Amarillo	41	27	Cldy	Colorado Springs	43	21	PCldy	Greensboro, N.C.	50	35	PCldy	Midland-Odessa	52	33	Cldy
Anchorage	31	26	Cldy	Columbia, S.C.	60	47	Cldy	Hartford	42	26	PCldy	Milwaukee	33	26	Cldy
Asheville	49	36	PCldy	Columbus, Ohio	35	28	Cldy	Harrisburg	42	26	PCldy	Mpls-St Paul	30	26	Cldy
Atlanta	55	44	PCldy	Concord, N.H.	31	18	PCldy	Hartford Spfld	35	23	PCldy	Missoula	34	25	Cldy
Atlantic City	43	23	PCldy	Columbus, Ohio	74	50	Rain	Honolulu	63	69	Rain	Montgomery	57	48	Cldy
Austin	60	47	Cldy	Dallas-Ft Worth	59	41	Rain	Houston	62	46	Rain	Nashville	45	32	Cldy
Baltimore	43	27	Cir	Dayton	35	26	Cldy	Huntsville	48	38	Cldy	New Orleans	64	53	Rain
Baton Rouge	60	47	Rain	Daytona Beach	69	54	PCldy	Indianapolis	33	26	Cldy	New York City	40	29	PCldy
Bilings	41	29	PCldy	Denver	44	34	PCldy	Jacksonville	66	51	Cldy	Newark	42	28	PCldy
Birmingham	52	44	Cldy	Des Moines	36	28	Cldy	Kansas City	37	29	Cldy	Norfolk-Va	47	34	PCldy
Bismarck	31	14	Cldy	Detroit	32	25	PCldy	Key West	47	34	PCldy	Omaha	37	27	PCldy
Boise	42	30	Cldy	El Paso	56	32	Cir	Las Vegas	55	41	Cldy	Orlando	72	53	PCldy
Boston	36	27	PCldy	Elkins	35	26	Cldy	Lincoln	38	25	Cldy	Paderborn	41	29	Cldy
Bridgport	40	27	PCldy	Erie	34	27	Cldy	Lubbock	55	41	Cldy	Pendleton	42	33	Rain
Brownsville	77	55	Cldy	Eugene	40	0	Cir	Las Vegas	55	41	Cldy	Perth	34	25	Cldy
Buffalo	30	24	PCldy	Evansville	39	28	Cldy	Lexington	40	30	Cldy	Philadelphia	42	28	PCldy
Burlington, Vt.	27	7	Cldy	Fargo	32	19	Cir	Little Rock	45	35	Cldy	Phoenix	63	46	Cldy
Caribou, Maine	27	7	Cldy	Flagstaff	41	16	PCldy	Los Angeles	65	51	PCldy	Pittsburgh	34	25	Cldy
Charleston, S.C.	63	45	PCldy	Flint	32	22	PCldy	Fort Smith	46	37	Cldy				
Charleston, W.Va.	39	31	Cldy	Fort Smith	46	37	Cldy								
Charlotte, N.C.	54	38	Cir												

National temperature extremes
Hi: Wed., 81, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Lo: Wed., 7, Willow City, N.D.

Frazz



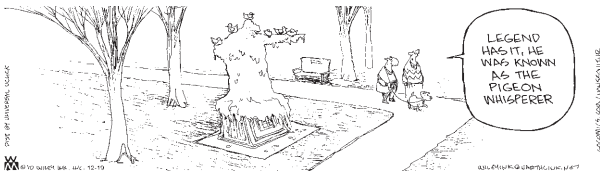
Dilbert



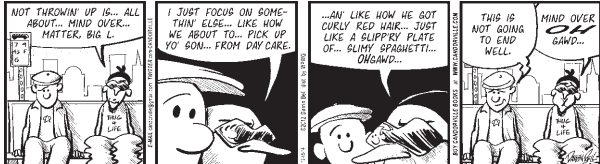
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Get Fuzzy



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16				17				
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28				29	30			
31	32	33						34				
35					36			37				
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
					45			46		47		
48	49	50	51							52		
53						54				55		
56						57				58		

ACROSS

- Lingerie item
- Tavern
- Swap
- Young fellow
- Rage
- "Die Lorelei" poet
- Multipurpose truck
- Big church
- "A pox upon thee!"
- Scoundrel
- Road divergence
- Dos Passos trilogy
- Garbage barge
- Tummy muscles
- Old name for China
- Speechify
- Hotel accommodation
- "My Antonia" writer
- Cudgel
- Yon folks
- Bullring bravo
- Tubular pasta
- Shows patience
- Crib
- Causing release
- "Erie Canal" mule
- Elevator stop
- Japanese veggie
- Mound stat
- Bonnie's partner

DOWN

- Texas Hold 'Em tactic
- Proportion
- "Doe, — ..."
- Farouse
- Chaseway orb
- Greek consonants
- Quaker address
- Roulette bet
- Atmosphere
- "CSI" evidence
- Slithery swimmer
- Indoor climate-control tech.
- Comic Griffin
- Bearcat maker
- Actor McBride
- Feedbag morsel
- Ex follower
- Spelldown
- Smile center
- Autumn abbr.
- Cheery sound?
- Corroded
- Bellow
- Happen to
- Brightened
- "A Doll's House" playwright
- Miss America's bling
- Some dental work
- Kind of house
- Highlander
- Refrigerant inits.
- Everything
- Plaything
- Coal carrier

Answer to Previous Puzzle

G	E	M		C	L	U	E		E	F	T	S
A	L	I		R	I	S	E		Y	O	W	L
M	I	C	H	E	N	E	R		E	R	I	E
		H	O	W		D	I	S		B	A	N
S	P	I	D	E	R		E	U	R			
H	O	G		L	U	G		B	O	M	B	S
A	S	A	P		M	O	W		W	I	L	E
D	E	N	I	M		D	O	M		C	U	E
		N	O	N		K	O	S	H	E	R	
D	A	Y	B	O	O	K		T	E	E		
A	R	E	A		M	I	C	H	E	L	L	E
S	I	L	L		A	L	O	E		I	A	N
H	A	L	L		D	O	O	R		N	Y	E

12-19

CRYPTOQUIP

RJVXTWGQ NYD-WQEJGOWAWQX

YZWQXR DTJ YGW WKOWNNWQX

YX JGOTWRXGYXBQZ AVRBO:

XTW XWKYR YGGYQZWGR.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: EIGHT LARGE, MEAN PARROTS ESCAPED THEIR OWNER'S HOME. THEY WERE DEFINITELY MACAWS FOR ALARM.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals A

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Ernie Gates

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OPINION

US may get dragged into Pakistan's war

By JOSH ROGIN AND ELI LAKE
 Bloomberg News

The massacre Tuesday at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, is likely to set off a new round of fighting between the country's army and the Taliban. But the attack may also push President Barack Obama to renew the counter-terrorism partnership with Pakistan that has deteriorated since the U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011.

The latest U.S. intelligence assessment on Tuesday, according to counter-terrorism officials in Washington, is not pretty. It predicts more Taliban attacks in response to the Pakistani military's expected retaliation for the murder of at least 130 students at the school for the children of army officers.

A spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, Muhammad Khorasani, said Tuesday that the attack on the school itself was in response to the campaign launched this summer by Pakistan's military against the Taliban in the provinces that border Afghanistan. He also grimly warned that the carnage at the school was "just the trailer," implying that a cycle of massacres may just be beginning.

This expected new wave of terror comes as the United States is already shifting military resources from Southwest Asia to the Middle East, as the U.S. military is preparing to end the war in Afghanistan. Add to this the increased frustration from Washington with Pakistan's military intelligence agency for its continued support for a network of former officers that help direct and coordinate activities for the Afghanistan Taliban.

The new crisis in Peshawar may change that dynamic, presenting an opportunity for the U.S. to re-engage in Pakistan's own war on terror, according to current and former U.S. officials.

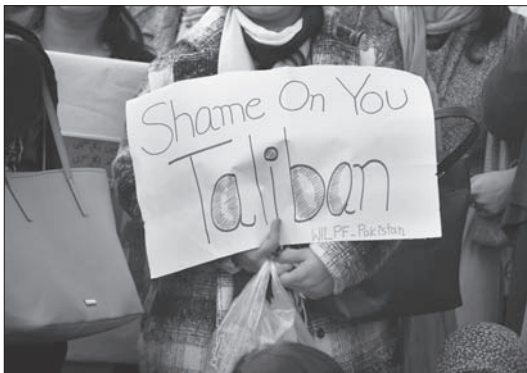
In separate visits to Washington in recent weeks, Pakistani Army chief General Raheel Sharif and Defense Minister Khawaja Asif touted their military's recent offensives against militants in northwest Pakistan as key to their request for continued U.S. military assistance, even as Western forces withdraw from Afghanistan. On Tuesday, the spokesman for Pakistan's military tweeted, "This ghastly act of cowardice of killing innocents clearly indicates they are not only enemies of Pak but enemies of humanity."

Billions of dollars in U.S. aid to Pakistan's military since 2002 has come in the form of Coalition Support Funds, to reimburse Pakistan for aiding the fight in Afghanistan, and from fees paid in exchange for use of Pakistan's territory to transit goods in and out of Afghanistan. But with the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan near complete, there is no coalition to support and no need to transit goods, leaving the Pakistanis desperate to make the case for continued aid.

"The main reason the Pakistanis finally went into North Waziristan was because they knew they had to have to do it in order to continue to get U.S. Coalition Support Funding. To justify U.S. funding after the Afghanistan withdrawal, they had to show they are becoming more aggressive against terrorism at large," said Shamila Chaudhary, a former National Security Council specialist on Pakistan. "Now after this, they may have no choice but to continue doing it."

Michael Flynn, who retired this fall as director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, said the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP, and other Jihadist groups would likely continue to launch these kinds of onslaughts.

"Do we have the bandwidth to deal with the scale and scope of this fight against terrorism in this new irregular battlefield?"



ANJUM NAVEED/AP

A member of a civil society group holds an anti-Taliban placard to condemn Tuesday's Pakistani Taliban attack on a military-run school in Peshawar, as members of multiple groups join a demonstration Wednesday in Islamabad, Pakistan. More than 140 people, most of them children, were killed in the massacre in the country's northwest.

he asked. "The response of terrorists to conventional fighting will be more of these sorts of attacks. This is how they have decided to fight us and to them, these attacks are a measure of success simply due to the propaganda value they receive."

Inside the Obama administration, officials have been divided between those who believe that the TTP represents primarily a threat to Pakistan and those who believe

Lawmakers in both parties have been fed up for years by what many in Washington see as a two-faced approach by Pakistan, fighting some militants while ignoring or even supporting others.

the TTP escalates and the implications for the entire country's future become more pronounced.

"For the U.S., it's yet another example of how much space the Pakistani state has lost to militant power. It's yet another example of how bad and extreme the situation has got in terms of internal stability," Chaudhary said. "U.S. policy makers are going to be very worried about it."

If and when the Obama administration does decide to increase its material and financial support for the Pakistani government, it will face an uphill climb on Capitol Hill. Lawmakers in both parties have been fed up for years by what many in Washington see as a two-faced approach by Pakistan, fighting some militants while ignoring or even supporting others.

Congress has put a series of conditions on the large U.S. assistance programs for Pakistan in legislation, most of which the Pakistani government has no chance of meeting. For example, in the omnibus spending bill that Congress passed last week, Pakistan is required to combat all militant groups operating inside its bor-

ders and make broad reforms of its political, diplomatic and legal systems before receiving U.S. aid.

The president can and typically does invoke a national security waiver provided by Congress to nullify such restrictions. But going forward, if the U.S. does ramp up its involvement in Pakistan's war against the Taliban, members of Congress are going to demand Pakistan live up to its long unfulfilled promises to go after the militant groups that threaten the stability of Afghanistan as well.

"The question the U.S. will be asking the Pakistani military is, if we increase our support, where does that put the Afghan Taliban? Are you going to show us concrete results against them?" said Shuja Nawaz, distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council. "The army chief has been saying we are not discriminating, but the evidence will need to be shown to support that. This is an opportunity for them to get their act together, and if they do the U.S. and other allies could be quite happy to provide assistance."

A big part of that will depend on the Pakistani and Afghan governments continuing down the road of reconciliation, capitalizing on the exit of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who had a terrible relationship with both Pakistani and American leaders. Without Afghan buy in, the TTP can just move its operations over the border and find a safe haven where the Pakistani military can't touch them.

In the end, there is a recognition in Washington that the U.S. has no choice but to continue giving military assistance to Pakistan, whether the Pakistani military lives up to its promises or not. And as the war between the Pakistani government and the TTP ramps up, the U.S. will feel compelled to ramp up its involvement, despite the budget crisis, the war weariness of the populace, and Obama's desire to exit the U.S. from military involvement in the region.

"We're going to have to continue with a lot of military and counterterrorism funding for Pakistan for the foreseeable future," said Jonah Blank, a Pakistan expert at the Rand Corp. "Every time you want to get out, they pull you back in."

Josh Rogin and Eli Lake are Bloomberg View columnists who write about national security and foreign affairs.

OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Afghan troops trained by best Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

The long war in Afghanistan is winding down, with American forces gradually pulling out and turning over control of security to Afghan forces.

Green Berets from Fort Bragg have seen other conflicts reach this point, only for reversals to erase those gains. But they and their commanders believe what they have accomplished in Afghanistan is unprecedented and can endure. ...

Through years of cooperation and trust, the U.S. special and conventional forces have forged bonds with the new Afghan military that will persist after most Americans have gone home.

U.S. forces continue to advise, but they've trained the Afghan instructors who prepare new Afghan commands. Afghan Special Mission Wing units have also been deployed that allow them to conduct their own insertions into difficult terrain and their own remote aerial surveillance.

The Green Berets and other special operations forces are justly proud of these achievements. No other foreign force working with Americans has been trained to this level. These Afghan special forces are being compared, not to those of other small countries but to the elite forces of the world's top militaries.

Just as Americans' hopes have been with U.S. troops, they will now focus on those who continue their work.

Sydney suffered lunatic's wrath (Savannah, Ga.) Morning News

Experts seemed divided about whether the so-called "lunatic" leader — "sheh" who was killed Monday in a standoff with police in Sydney, was a nutcase or a terrorist who was acting alone.

It doesn't matter. Both are essentially the same thing.

What matters is that citizens in America and other countries targeted by Muslim fanatics keep their guards up. Intelligence is vital. Individuals with a history of violent acts and links to terrorism must be monitored. While that's tough to do within the confines of existing laws, local and national authorities must not forget that America is in the cross hairs. It takes just one lunatic to cause havoc.

Man Haron Monis, 50, who was identified by Australian media as the gunman behind a tense 16-hour standoff inside a Sydney coffee shop, fits that bill. Monis was born in Iran, then migrated to Australia in 1996. He pleaded guilty last year to several letters to the families of fallen Australian servicemen in which he called them "murderers" and child-killers. This creep was sentenced to community service but appealed that ruling — an appeal that was denied Dec. 12, which may have triggered the hostage-taking.

Monis also was linked to other crimes and violence. He had been charged in connection with the death of his ex-wife, who had been stabbed 18 times and set on fire. He was charged with more than 50 allegations of indecent and sexual assault related to a time when he worked as a self-proclaimed "sexual healer."

Sadly, two innocent people were killed during the rescue operation. Their deaths are tragic reminders of what's at stake in the battle against terror.

But in describing Monis, don't call him a "lone wolf." That's an insult to wolves. Instead, it's "lone" is hard to be accurate. Call them "lone rats."



Obama meek amid mayhem Boston Herald

The loss of life at a Pakistani school is unfathomable — at least 141 dead, 132 of them children.

What kind of monsters target children? The same kind who two years ago would target a Pakistani schoolgirl named Malala Yousafzai, now a Nobel Prize laureate.

The Taliban — whose name President Barack Obama somehow chose to omit from his prepared response to the attack — seems fixated on targeting the innocent. This school in the northwestern city of Peshawar was part of a network of schools run by the military. Its students in grades 1 through 10 were the children of military personnel and civilians. Most of the students at this school were from civilian families. ...

The seven gunmen who attacked the school, all now dead, were equipped with explosive vests — determined to kill the maximum number of children one way or another.

"By targeting students and teachers in this heinous attack, terrorists have once again shown their depravity," Obama said in a one-paragraph statement that praised Pakistan's efforts against these terrorists he refused to name — although the Taliban were quick to claim responsibility.

Perhaps to name the terrorists is also to draw attention to the similar horrific reality in neighboring Afghanistan from which the president has been so eager to extricate U.S. troops. To name the terrorists is to bring back memories of how the Taliban provided safe haven and training camps for al-Qaida, for Osama bin Laden, for those who claimed 3,000 lives on our own shores.

No, we cannot be policemen to the world or attempt to settle age-old grudges halfway around the globe. But neither can we be as inattentive to the consequences of a global retreat as the Obama administration has been. To do so is to invite more mayhem and more killing.

Shame is a second assault (San Antonio) Express-News

There are many potential tragedies tied to Rolling Stone's recent reporting debacle, a shocking rape account at the University of Virginia in which key details have not held up under scrutiny.

It would be tragic if that story, with so much blowback about the woman who made the claims, kept sexual assault survivors from sharing their own stories. If we are to meaningfully address sexual assault on college campuses, military institutions or any other setting, we need survivors to report their assaults. ...

Already, too many pressures keep sexual assault survivors from reporting their attacks and speaking up: shame, humiliation and, yes, fear of retribution.

That was the crux of the San Antonio Express-News' "Twice Betrayed" series,

in which women in the military reported being sexually assaulted, only to be doubted and punished by commanders. Following intense media coverage about this dynamic, reports of sexual assault in the military increased by 50 percent. And yet the military has acknowledged the issue is still dramatically underreported because victims struggle with coming forward.

It would also be tragic, then, if this article becomes fodder to undercut other allegations of rape and sexual assault, particularly on college campuses. It might make for an easy citation to inject doubt in other cases, but it is very much an outlier. ...

Congress would do well to pass the bipartisan Campus Accountability and Safety Act, which would require colleges and universities to provide confidential advisers to guide sexual assault victims through services and law enforcement. It would help improve incident reporting and compel authorities to investigate allegations.

The sad reality is we live in a world where sexual assault, especially against women, is prevalent. It would be doubly tragic to use one high-profile case of bad journalism to cast doubt on so many truthful survivors.

Jeb Bush can stick to his guns The Wall Street Journal

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush announced Tuesday that he will "actively explore" a presidential run, and his entry would strengthen a GOP field that already looks like it will be far better than it was in 2012. This means there will be no coronations, and already the media are asking if Bush is conservative enough to win the party nomination.

This is an odd question considering Bush's success as a notably conservative governor in the polyglot Sunshine State from 1999-2007. He cut taxes many times and was a leader in K-12 reform, including pushing school choice for public and private schools. He was also popular, which we took as a political asset.

Then again, Bush hinted at this concern himself this month at The Wall Street Journal CEO Council, noting that "I kind of know how a Republican can win, whether it's me or somebody else — and it has to be much more uplifting, much more positive, much more willing to be 'lose the primary to win the general' without violating your principles. It's not an easy task, to be honest with you."

One of his likely competitors, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, jumped on that remark to suggest that Bush thinks he has to run against the GOP base to win. And to our mind Bush's strategy was needlessly defensive. The way to win the nomination isn't to run as the candidate of this or that faction but to offer the ideas and persona that can unite the party. It's also the best way to show voters that Bush is his own man, and not a copy of his father or brother.

The worst strategy — and a guaranteed loser — is to run as an ostentatious moder-

ate opposed to the GOP base. John McCain tried this in 2000 and so did Jon Huntsman in 2012. They were media favorites but lost because conservatives won't nominate someone who lectures them about ideological shortcomings. They want a champion for their principles even if they disagree with the nominee on some issues.

Bush's two main political liabilities in the primaries are said to be his support for immigration and for Common Core education standards. Neither is an insuperable barrier to the nomination. ...

Our own concerns with Bush are less about policy than what he's been doing since he's been governor and how much he really wants to be president. Bush has sometimes seemed diffident about running, and a half-hearted campaign won't work against Paul, Ted Cruz and Scott Walker, much less the Clinton tong. ...

Bush's name and experience are formidable enough that his entry in the race would cause other potentially appealing candidates to stay out of the field. All the more reason to be sure he's in for the rough and tumble.

Spending bill secrecy shameful The Kansas City (Mo.) Star

Last week Congress rushed to pass the awkwardly named "crombinus." It was more than just a mashup of a continuing resolution (the "cr") that is and omnibus spending bill. Lawmakers — primarily Republicans — inserted inappropriate pet causes, pork and pandering to special interests.

Because lawmakers again waited until the eve of a government shutdown to act, there had been no time to write a thoughtful budget that reflected overarching policy goals. The crombinus neither helps the middle class nor reduces the deficit. Instead, it allows the country to hobble along for another year.

Not content to do no good, the GOP-controlled House insisted on doing harm by inserting policy and spending priorities where they don't belong. Many Democrats served as their enablers, supporting the crombinus with the thin rationale that it could have been worse.

On the spending front, millions of dollars will buy fighter jets that the Pentagon had not even asked for. Someone's district will score big.

Meanwhile, Congress cut \$93 million from the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. WIC helps low-income mothers buy food for their children. It also cut funds for two major Republican bogeymen — the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service.

Policy riders in the bill were even worse. ... At the request of big banks, Republicans added part of the 2008 Dodd-Frank financial reform enacted after the collapse of the financial industry. It's an arcane change, but the bottom line is that Washington no longer will forbid big banks from engaging in some of the practices that led to the financial crisis. If things go south again, taxpayers will be on the hook for another round of bailouts.

The financial industry's generous political contributions no doubt helped it win that concession. ... Starting next year, they and other big donors can give even more because Republicans eased campaign finance reform, but kept the campaign political parties. If only those hungry WIC mothers and children had millions they could give to politicians. ...

Both Democrats and Republicans have used the budget bill to accomplish policy goals in the past. It was never a particularly nefarious act, but the crombinus constrained timeline made the practice particularly odious this time. ...

Exploiting the budget process to bypass public scrutiny and democratic debate only reinforces the overwhelming American consensus that, despite faint appearances of bipartisanship, Congress truly is broken.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Best of the rest

A breakdown of the top bowls not in the 'New Year's Six'



Holiday Bowl

No. 24 Southern California (8-4)
vs. No. 25 Nebraska (9-3)

Date: Dec. 27

Location: San Diego

Notes: This marks only the fifth meeting between these storied programs. USC owns a 3-0-1 edge in the series. The question for Nebraska is how it will respond to interim coach Barney Cotton, who will handle the bowl game assignment following the firing of Bo Pelini.



Texas Bowl

Arkansas (6-6) vs. Texas (6-6)

Date: Dec. 29

Location: Houston

Notes: The revival of an old Southwest Conference rivalry makes this much more interesting than a typical matchup between .500 teams. Texas leads the series 56-21 and won the last meeting 52-10 in 2008. The only other time they met in a bowl game, Arkansas won 27-6 in the 2000 Cotton Bowl. Even though neither team has a winning record, both showed signs of progress late in the season.



Music City Bowl

No. 22 LSU (8-4)
vs. Notre Dame (7-5)

Date: Dec. 30

Location: Nashville, Tennessee

Notes: This game between these big-name schools has grown even more intriguing because of Notre Dame's quarterback uncertainty. Irish coach Brian Kelly has said he's opening up the quarterback competition and giving Malik Zaire an opportunity to win the job. Everett Golson has started every game for the Irish.

STEVE MEGARGEE

The Associated Press

With nearly 40 bowl games looming, it can be difficult finding those postseason gems.

The Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl semifinals in the College Football Playoff are no-brainers. And the other matchups in the "New Year's Six" — which includes the Peach, Orange, Cotton and Fiesta — also should garner lots of attention.

But the entire postseason schedule features 39 bowls, including the playoff championship game.

To help sort through the clutter, here's a look at some of the more intriguing matchups that aren't part of the "New Year's Six."



UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley holds the school record for career touchdown passes.

RAY CHAVEZ, BAY AREA NEWS GROUP/TNS



Belk Bowl

No. 13 Georgia (9-3)
vs. No. 17 Louisville (9-3)

Date: Dec. 30

Location: Charlotte, N.C.

Notes: Louisville defensive coordinator Todd Grantham's connection to both schools gives this matchup an unusual twist. Grantham was Georgia's defensive coordinator from 2010-13 before heading to Louisville. Louisville's Gerod Holliman has 14 interceptions this season.



Outback Bowl

No. 19 Auburn (8-4)
vs. No. 17 Wisconsin (10-3)

Date: Jan. 1

Location: Tampa, Fla.

Notes: Although the Outback takes place on New Year's Day, it's not part of the "New Year's Six." Wisconsin ranks fourth nationally in rushing with 314 yards per game. Auburn is 12th with 258.5. Wisconsin averages 6.9 yards per carry, while Auburn averages 5.5. Wisconsin will be looking for redemption after being embarrassed in the Big Ten championship game.



Alamo Bowl

No. 11 Kansas State (9-3)
vs. No. 14 UCLA (9-3)

Date: Jan. 2

Location: San Antonio

Notes: Kansas State has one of the nation's top receivers in Tyler Lockett, who has caught 93 passes for 1,351 yards and nine touchdowns this season. UCLA boasts quarterback Brett Hundley, who has set school records for career touchdown passes with 74 and total offense this season with 4,095 yards.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL



DAVID TULUS/AP

Georgia coach Mark Richt paces the sideline during the game against Georgia Tech last month. The Bulldogs went from playing for an SEC title to closing the season in the Belk Bowl.

Georgia guarding against meltdown

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
The Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Going into the final week of the regular season, the Georgia Bulldogs had hopes of playing for a Southeastern Conference title, maybe even claiming a spot in the four-team national playoff.

Instead, they'll close the year in a bowl sponsored by a department store.

Talk about a meltdown. No. 13 Georgia (9-3) returned to practice Wednesday to begin preparations for the Dec. 30 Belk Bowl against No. 20 Louisville (9-3).

It's an intriguing matchup, pitting the high-scoring Bulldogs against their former defensive coordinator (Todd Grantham) in one of just four bowls outside the majors to feature a pair of teams ranked in The Associated Press Top 25.

That said, Georgia was hoping for so much more heading into its last game against Georgia Tech.

"We made our bed," cornerback Damian Swann said. "Now we've got to lay in it."

Based on recent history, coach Mark Richt will be on the lookout for any signs that his team isn't ready to compete against the Cardinals, a team that has a lot more to gain than the Bulldogs. Georgia has lost three of its last four bowls and looked thoroughly uninspired a year ago in a Gator Bowl loss to Nebraska after a disappointing season.

"That's where we've got to coach, and where the players have got to decide to compete," Richt said. "We've got a chance to win 10 games. ... We've got a realistic chance to finish in the Top 10 when things are all said and done."

Georgia will long lament those Southeastern Conference losses to South Carolina and Florida, teams with a combined record of 12-11. Even so, they had a shot to make the SEC championship game until Missouri rallied to beat Arkansas the day after Thanksgiving, less than 24 hours before the Bulldogs hosted their

state rival. After being knocked out of a shot at a league title, the Bulldogs were still in the driver's seat for a major bowl bid. But Georgia Tech improbably rallied in the final 18 seconds of regulation to tie the game, then preserved a wild overtime victory by picking off Hutson Mason's pass from the 9-yard line.

"You've got to have a short memory," receiver Chris Conley said. "If you do that, you realize you've got one more game to play. For the seniors, it's the last game wearing the red and black. For the younger guys, it's a way for them to jump-start next season."

You go into spring practice based on what you did in bowl practice. So it's very important for them in terms of playing time next year." Linebacker Leonard Floyd, who led the team with six sacks, would not play in Charlotte after undergoing shoulder surgery.

But there has been some good news since the loss to Georgia Tech. Floyd was among four key players — along with linebacker Jordan Jenkins, receiver Malcolm Mitchell and offensive lineman John Theus — who told Richt they plan to return for their senior seasons rather than entering the NFL Draft.

"Things can always change, but that's where we're at right now," Richt said. "Those guys are highly productive and worked hard, and the younger guys look up to them, too."

Mason will be playing his final college game, his lone year as the starter not quite living up his goal of going out with a championship. But the Bulldogs are averaging nearly 42 points a game, which could go down as the highest-scoring season in school history.

"This is where we're at," said Mason, a fifth-year senior. "Let's go 10-3, not 9-4, and finish this thing off right. It's been a heck of a season for the offense. Those are things when you're looking back — even though you didn't accomplish the goals you wanted to accomplish — no one can take away that you were part of the best offense in Georgia history."

Scoreboard

Bowl glance	
Saturday, Dec. 20	
New Orleans Bowl	Nevada (7-5) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette (8-4)
New Mexico Bowl	
At Albuquerque	
UTEP (7-5) vs. Utah State (9-4)	Las Vegas Bowl
Colorado State (10-2) vs. Utah (8-4)	Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
At Boise	
W. Michigan (9-4) vs. Air Force (9-3)	Camelia Bowl
At Montgomery, Ala.	
Bowling Green (7-5) vs. South Alabama (6-6)	
Monday, Dec. 22	
Miami Beach Bowl	
BYU (8-4) vs. Memphis (9-2)	
Tuesday, Dec. 23	
Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl	
Marshall (12-1) vs. N. Illinois (11-2)	
Poinsettia Bowl	
At San Diego	
Navy (6-5) vs. San Diego State (7-5)	
Wednesday, Dec. 24	
Bahamas Bowl	
At Nassau	
Western Kentucky (7-5) vs. Central Michigan (7-5)	
Hawaii Bowl	
At Honolulu	
Rice (7-5) vs. Fresno State (6-7)	
Friday, Dec. 26	
Heart of Dallas Bowl	
Illinois (6-5) vs. South Tech (8-4)	
Quick Lane Bowl	
At Detroit	
Rutgers (7-5) vs. North Carolina (6-6)	
St. Petersburg (Fla.) Bowl	
UCF (9-3) vs. N.C. State (9-3)	
Saturday, Dec. 27	
Military Bowl	
At Annapolis, Md.	
Virginia Tech (6-6) vs. Cincinnati (9-3)	
Sun Bowl	
At El Paso, Texas	
Duke (9-3) vs. Arizona State (9-3)	
Independence Bowl	
At Miami, N.Y.	
Miami (6-6) vs. South Carolina (6-6)	
Pinstripe Bowl	
At Bronx, N.Y.	
Boston College (7-5) vs. Penn State (6-6)	
Holiday Bowl	
At San Diego	
Nebraska (6-5) vs. Southern Cal (8-4)	
Monday, Dec. 29	
Bermy Bowl	
At Memphis, Tenn.	
W. Virginia (7-5) vs. Baylor (7-5)	
Russell Athletic Bowl	
At Orlando, Fla.	
Clemson (9-3) vs. Oklahoma (8-4)	
Texas Bowl	
At Houston	
Texas (6-6) vs. Arkansas (6-6)	
Wednesday, Dec. 30	
Music City Bowl	
At Nashville, Tenn.	
Notre Dame (7-5) vs. LSU (8-4)	
Belk Bowl	
At Charlotte, N.C.	
Louisville (9-3) vs. Georgia (9-3)	
Posters Farm Bowl	
At Santa Clara, Calif.	
Stanford (7-5) vs. Maryland (7-5)	
Wednesday, Dec. 31	
Peach Bowl	
At Atlanta	
Mississippi (9-3) vs. TCU (11-1)	
Fiesta Bowl	
At Glendale, Ariz.	
Boise State (11-2) vs. Arizona (10-3)	
Orange Bowl	
At Miami	
Mississippi State (10-2) vs. Georgia Tech (10-3)	
Thursday, Jan. 1	
Outback Bowl	
At Tampa, Fla.	
Wisconsin (10-3) vs. Arkansas (9-4)	
Cotton Bowl Classic	
At Arlington, Texas	
Michigan State (10-2) vs. Baylor (11-1)	
Crusier Bowl	
At Orlando, Fla.	
Minnesota (8-4) vs. Missouri (10-3)	
Rose Bowl	
At Pasadena, Calif.	
Playoff semifinal: Oregon (12-1) vs. Florida State (12-1)	
Sugar Bowl	
New Orleans	
Playoff semifinal: Alabama (12-1) vs. Ohio State (12-1)	
Friday, Jan. 2	
Armed Forces Bowl	
At Fort Worth, Texas	
Pittsburgh (6-6) vs. Houston (7-5)	
Alamo Bowl	
At Jacksonville, Fla.	
Iowa (7-5) vs. Tennessee (6-6)	
UCLA (9-3) vs. Kansas State (9-3)	
Cactus Bowl	
At Tempe, Ariz.	
Oklahoma State (6-6) vs. Washington (8-5)	
Saturday, Jan. 3	
Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl	
At Birmingham, Ala.	
Florida (6-5) vs. Arkansas (8-4)	
Godaddy Bowl	
At Mobile, Ala.	
Toledo (8-4) vs. North Carolina State (7-5)	
Saturday, Jan. 10	
MetLife Bowl	
At Charleston, S.C.	
American Football Association	
Monday, Jan. 12	
College Football Championship	
At Arlington, Texas	
Sugar Bowl winner vs. Rose Bowl winner	

Briefly

Pelini ripped AD in last talk with Nebraska players

The Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — On the day he was introduced as Youngstown State's new head coach, the ugly nature of Bo Pelini's departure from Nebraska was revealed.

Pelini, who was fired on Nov. 30, lambasted Nebraska athletic director Shawn Eichorst in a profanity-filled talk during his final meeting with his players. The Omaha World-Herald on Wednesday reported that it had a writer listen to an audiotape of Pelini's address to the players on Dec. 2 at a Lincoln high school.

The university said in a statement that if the audiotape is authentic, "it only reaffirms the decision that he should no longer be a leader of young men at Nebraska."

"His habitual use of inappropriate language, and his personal and professional attacks on administrators, are antithetical to the values of our university," the statement said. "His behavior is consistent with a pattern of unprofessional, disrespectful behavior directed by Mr. Pelini toward the passionate fans of Nebraska, employees of the university and, most concerning, our student-athletes. This behavior is not tolerated at the University of Nebraska and, among many other concerns, played a role in his dismissal."

The newspaper didn't say who audiotaped Pelini's talk. Pelini was fired after going 9-3 this season and 66-27 over seven years.

Wisconsin brings Pitt's Chryst home as coach

MADISON, Wis. — Paul Chryst is back at Wisconsin, settling into familiar surroundings in his hometown.

This time, with a bigger office. Chryst was hired Wednesday to coach the Badgers, completing a whirlwind week for the Madison native and his alma mater following the surprising departure of Gary Andersen for Oregon State.

"I asked my mom ... 'Are you sure you want us back?'" Chryst said jokingly after an introductory news conference that felt more like a homecoming ceremony.

Chryst, a former Wisconsin offensive coordinator, leaves Pittsburgh after going 19-19 in three seasons.

The 49-year-old Chryst had two prior stints as an assistant for the Badgers. Most notably, he was part of the Wisconsin staff from 2005-11, helping the Badgers to five consecutive digit victory seasons and two Rose Bowls.

Chryst's departure from Pittsburgh sends the Panthers into their fourth coaching search in four years, and it cost longtime athletic director Steve Pederson his job.

The school parted ways with Pederson in what chancellor Patrick Gallagher called a mutual decision but one necessary for Pitt to move forward following the latest setback for a football program stuck in neutral. Pederson had nearly four years remaining on a contract that ran through 2018.

In other college football news: ■ Oregon cornerback Ifo Ekpre-Olomu hurt a knee in practice this week and his status for the Ducks' playoff game is uncertain, according to a person with knowledge of the injury.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday on the condition of anonymity because the program does not discuss injuries.

Ekpre-Olomu, a first-team All-America selection, was injured in practice on Tuesday. Yahoo Sports was the first to report the injury.

The Ducks had Wednesday off but were to resume practice Thursday.

Rays send Of Myers to Padres in big deal

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Padres acquired outfielder Wil Myers from the Tampa Bay Rays on Wednesday, a person with knowledge of the deal said.

Myers was the AL Rookie of the Year in 2013, when he hit .293 with 13 homers with 53 RBIs with Tampa Bay. But he was limited to 87 games last season due to a right wrist injury, and he hit .222 with six homers and 35 RBIs.

There were multiple reports that Washington also was involved in the deal, but the person would not confirm the Nationals' involvement to The Associated Press. San Diego also receives catcher Ryan Hanigan and minor league pitchers Jose Castillo and Gerardo Reyes in the trade, with catcher Rene Rivera moving from the Padres to Tampa Bay.

The person spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the trade had not been announced.

The deal comes as the Padres, desperate for a power bat to punch up the worst offense in the majors, try to finalize a trade that would send catcher Yasmani Grandal and two pitchers to the Los Angeles Dodgers for outfielder Matt Kemp and catcher Tim Federowicz.

NHL/COLLEGE BASKETBALL



ANN HEISENHEIT/AP

Bruins left wing Loui Eriksson, center, and Wild right wing Justin Fontaine, right, chase a rebound in front of Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom during Wednesday's game in St. Paul, Minn. Eriksson scored in overtime to give Boston a 3-2 victory.

Roundup

Eriksson's OT goal gives Bruins a win

The Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Boston Bruins needed a win like this. Well, any win, really.

Loui Eriksson's goal 1:30 into overtime gave Boston a 3-2 win over Minnesota on Wednesday night, only the second victory for the Bruins in eight games and the fourth loss for the Wild in the past six.

Carl Soderberg, who set up the winner with a cross-crease pass in front of Wild defenseman Marco Scandella, scored in the first period for the Bruins. So did Patrice Bergeron, on a send-it-after-the-net shot just across the blue line that knuckled in front of Niklas Backstrom and skipped past the goalie's blocker.

That was the kind of lucky bounce the Bruins have been lacking lately.

"You know what? It's time we got a break," coach Claude Julien said.

Niklas Svedberg made 35 saves for the Bruins in just his second start in 11 games to give a rest to Tuukka Rask, who lost in shootouts on Tuesday at Nashville and on Saturday against Ottawa.

"He was great. He definitely made some huge saves," Bergeron said.

Especially in the second period, when the Wild outshot the Bruins a whopping 20-5 without a score to show for it. They had a 5-on-3 advantage for 62 seconds but managed only one shot, and coach Mike Yeo was upset with the power play afterward. The Wild are third-to-last in the NHL, with a 12.3 percent success rate.

Kyle Brodziak scored early and Jason Pominville tied the game for the Wild with 8:21 remaining in regulation when a failed clear of the rebound of Ryan Sperry's shot gave Suter the puck back for

a pass that ping-ponged off Pominville's foot.

Kyle Brodziak also had a goal for the Wild, but Backstrom was beaten in the net for the second straight night. He stopped 22 shots and wished he had the one by Bergeron back.

"I feel stupid to let in a goal like that. I think it was going to the corner and just hit the ice, bounced up, changed direction, went into the net," Backstrom said.

Senators 2, Devils 0: Craig Anderson made 34 saves, and Kyle Turris scored two goals as Ottawa blanked host New Jersey. Anderson earned his third shutout of the season and 29th in his NHL career.

The Devils, whose losing streak was extended to five games, went 0-for-5 on the power play — stymied by Anderson throughout.

Turris gave the Senators a 1-0 lead with a power-play goal 2:47 in on Ottawa's first shot of the game. Turris was off balance as he deflected Erik Karlsson's point shot past Cory Schneider for his first goal in 11 games.

He added an empty-net goal in the final second of the game.

Stars 2, Canucks 0: Kari Lehtonen made 27 saves for his second shutout this season and the 29th of his career as visiting Dallas extended Vancouver's losing streak to five games.

Colton Sceviour and Antoine Roussel, into an empty net, scored for the Stars.

Eddie Lack stopped 27 shots for Vancouver. Lack started for the first time since Dec. 7 in place of No. 1 goalie Ryan Miller, who gave up five goals on 23 shots in a 5-1 loss to the New York Rangers on Saturday.

Lehtonen has four wins this month but came in with a 3.10 goals-against average on the season.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	33	20	10	3	43	110	87
Montreal	32	20	10	2	42	87	80
Detroit	32	17	7	8	42	92	80
Toronto	31	19	9	3	41	109	87
Boston	32	16	13	3	35	81	83
Florida	29	13	8	8	34	66	75
Ottawa	31	13	12	6	32	82	86
Buffalo	32	13	17	2	28	62	100

Metropolitan Division							
Pittsburgh	30	20	6	4	44	98	71
N.Y. Islanders	31	21	10	0	42	99	89
N.Y. Rangers	29	15	10	4	34	89	79
Washington	30	14	10	6	34	86	81
Columbus	30	13	15	2	28	72	95
New Jersey	33	11	16	6	28	74	96
Philadelphia	30	11	14	5	27	80	90
Carolina	30	8	19	3	19	62	87

Western Conference

Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Chicago	32	22	9	1	45	100	64
St. Louis	31	21	8	2	44	94	72
Nashville	30	20	8	2	42	81	59
Winnipeg	32	16	10	6	38	78	75
Minnesota	30	16	12	2	34	86	78
Dallas	30	12	13	5	29	87	103

Colorado	30	10	13	7	27	78	98
Pacific Division							
Anaheim	33	21	7	5	47	97	89
Vancouver	31	18	11	2	38	89	88
San Jose	32	17	11	4	38	90	82
Los Angeles	32	15	11	6	36	84	78
Calgary	33	17	14	2	36	97	90
Arizona	31	11	16	4	26	72	100
Edmonton	32	7	19	6	20	66	106

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Tuesday's games						
Columbus 1, Detroit 0, 5:50						
Florida 2, Washington 1, 5:00						
San Jose 3, Philadelphia 1						
Montreal 6, Anaheim 2, 5:00						
St. Louis 5, Los Angeles 2						
Winnipeg 5, Buffalo 1						
Arizona 5, Minnesota 3						
N.Y. Rangers 5, Calgary 2						
Chicago 2, Edmonton 1, OT						

Wednesday's games						
Ottawa 2, New Jersey 0						
Boston 3, Minnesota 2, OT						
Dallas 2, Vancouver 0						

Thursday's games						
Florida at Philadelphia						
Colorado at Pittsburgh						
San Jose at Montreal						
Los Angeles at Washington						
Edmonton at St. Louis						

Friday's games						
Tampa Bay at New Jersey						
Anaheim at Ottawa						
N.Y. Islanders at Detroit						
Boston at Winnipeg						
Dallas at Calgary						

Wednesday

Bruins 3, Wild 2

Boston	2	0	0	1-3
Minnesota	1	0	1	0-2

First Period—1, Boston, Soderberg (6:16); 2, Boston, Soderberg (10:56); 3, Minnesota, Brodziak (4:34) (Sutter, Haula), 5:33. 3, Boston, Bergeron (6:06) (Bergeron, Trotman), 17:55.

Third Period—4, Minnesota, Pominville (10:57).

Overtime—5, Boston, Eriksson (6:06) (Soderberg, Chara), 1:30.

Shots on Goal—Boston 9-5:7-4=25. **Minnesota** 8-20-9-0=37.

Power-play opportunities—Boston 0 of 2; **Minnesota** 0 of 2.

Goalies—Boston, Svedberg 4-4-0 (37 shots-35 saves). **Minnesota,** Backstrom 5-3-2 (25-22).

A—18,841 (17,954). T—2:32.

Stars 2, Canucks 0

Dallas	0	1	0-2
Vancouver	0	0	0-0

Second Period—1, Dallas, Sceviour (2:40) (Horcoff, Fiddler), 2:53.

Third Period—2, Dallas, Roussel (7:16, 18:34) (en).

Shots on Goal—Dallas 5-17-7=29. **Vancouver** 11-4-12=27.

Power-play opportunities—Dallas 0 of 2; **Vancouver** 0 of 4.

Goalies—Dallas, Lehtonen 12-7-5 (27 shots-27 saves). **Vancouver,** Lack 2-4-2 (28-27).

A—18,755 (18,910). T—2:27.

Senators 2, Devils 0

Ottawa	1	0	1-2
New Jersey	0	0	0-0

First Period—1, Ottawa, Turris (5:18) (Karlsson, Stone), 2:47 (pp).

Second Period—2, Ottawa, Turris (6:40) (Karlsson, Borowick), 15:59 (en).

Shots on Goal—Ottawa 4-4-8=16. **New Jersey** 10-16-6=34.

Power-play opportunities—Ottawa 1 of 2; **New Jersey** 0 of 5.

Goalies—Ottawa, Anderson 7-8-4 (34 shots-34 saves). **New Jersey,** Cor-Schneider 11-15-13 (15-14).

A—15,379 (17,625). T—2:17.

Scoring leaders

Through Dec. 17			
GP	G	A	PTS
Tyler Seguin, Dal	30	23	15
Evgeni Malkin, Pit	30	15	22
Adam Lindgren, Pit	30	11	26
Valeri Tarasenko, StL	31	20	16
Four tied with 35 pts.			

Top 25 roundup

Cincinnati upsets No. 19 San Diego

The Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Four days after losing a game in double overtime because they couldn't make an open shot, the Bearcats fixed that problem.

Farad Cobb hit a three-pointer that put Cincinnati in control in overtime, and the Bearcats pulled away to a 71-62 victory over No. 19 San Diego State on Wednesday night after letting a late lead slip away in regulation.

The Bearcats (7-2) were coming off a 56-55 double-overtime loss at Nebraska on Saturday night that underscored their season-long struggle to hit shots. Cobb made the one in overtime that made the difference and finished with 12 points, tied for the team high.

San Diego State (7-3) lost for only the second time in its last 20 overtime games. Winston Shepard had a game-high 17 points, including a pair of free throws with 3.9 seconds left that tied it 57-all and sent it to overtime. The Aztecs were outscored 14-5 in overtime.

There were four ties and five lead changes during the first eight minutes of the second half. Shepard had a pair of free throws and a layup during an 11-4 run that put the Aztecs up 43-38.

Jermaine Sanders' three-pointer helped the Bearcats catch up. Cobb's three-pointer gave Cincinnati a 52-49 lead with 2:12 to go, matching its biggest lead in the game to that point.

No. 12 Ohio State 97, North Carolina AT&T 55: D'Angelo Russell scored 21 points and Marc Loving had 15, leading the host Buckeyes to a victory over the Aggies.



TOM UHLMAN/AP

Cincinnati's Farad Cobb shoots past San Diego State's JJ O'Brien, left, and Dwight Poley II during Wednesday's game in Cincinnati. Cobb finished with 12 points in the Bearcats' 71-62 overtime win.

NFL

Falcons QB downplays showdown with Saints

By GEORGE HENRY
The Associated Press

FLOWERY BRANCH, Ga. — Quarterback Matt Ryan says he and the Atlanta Falcons face no added pressure with everything on the line this week.

In the first season of a six-year, \$103.75 million contract, Ryan was hoping to steer Atlanta back to respectability, but that has not been the case.

The Falcons (5-9) have lost three of four heading into Sunday's game at New Orleans (6-8). They are third in the weak NFC South, but can win the division for the third time in five years if they beat the Saints and close the regular season with a victory over Carolina.

Ryan, though, insists that he's not preparing for the biggest regular-season game of his career.

"I don't know about that," Ryan told The Associated Press. "There's been plenty of big games early on. There's been tons of big ones."

Ryan said he's used this mindset since the Falcons drafted him No. 3 overall in 2008. His first quarterbacks coach, Bill Musgrave, told him that all games count the same.

So regardless if Julio Jones, the NFL's second-leading receiver, is unable to play against the Saints, Ryan disagrees that this game is bigger than others.

"When it comes to the end of the season and we see how things shake out, that's when everybody on the outside starts putting extra weight on it," Ryan said, "but I



DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan says Sunday's game at New Orleans is just like any other despite the playoff implications.

think from my perspective it's about preparing the same way every week, making sure that if it's game one against New Orleans or game 15 of the year that you're at your best when Sunday rolls around."

For Ryan, this season has added another unpleasant perspective on his career.

The two-time Pro Bowl QB and former Boston College standout went 55-24 and led the Falcons to four playoff appearances in his first five seasons.

But he and the team are 9-21 since finishing the 2012 season 10 yards shy of the Super Bowl, and it doesn't figure to get any easier this week. Atlanta is 1-5 at the Superdome under coach Mike Smith and 4-9 in the series.

"I think with where we're at and what's on the line, everybody understands what it is," Ryan said. "All that stuff is fun to talk about and fun to write about, but when you get on the field and between the lines, it all

comes down to playing the game and playing it well."

The Falcons are in playoff contention because of a 4-0 record in the NFC South. They beat the Saints 37-34 in Week 1 on Matt Bryant's overtime field goal, swept Tampa Bay and won at Carolina.

Ryan knows he must protect the football this week. Despite 10 touchdown passes in the last four games, Ryan has thrown an interception in each, and Atlanta is 1-3 in that span.

He will need to stay upright and keep drives alive by getting solid protection. New Orleans, which won Monday at Chicago after sacking Jay Cutler seven times, is skilled at mixing up pre-snap looks to confuse the opposition.

"I think it's going to be important for us on the road to be able to communicate very well in terms of our pass protection schemes," Ryan said. Saints defensive coordinator Rob Ryan is "very multiple, changes personnel groupings very well and puts a lot of pressure on your identification and communication. That's an area that we need to be razor sharp this week."

Notes: Jones, who hasn't practiced since setting an Atlanta team record with 259 yards receiving two weeks ago at Green Bay, is still sidelined by an injured hip. Smith would not say whether he thinks Jones will be able to practice this week. ... Other starters who did not participate in practice included WR Roddy White (knee), WR Harry Douglas (foot), right guard Jon Asamoah (back) and strong safety William Moore (foot).

QB: Lindley insists he's not the same player who mopped up in disastrous '12 season

FROM BACK PAGE

When Carson Palmer went down with a season-ending knee injury, the Cardinals signed Lindley off the San Diego practice squad. And when Palmer's replacement, Drew Stanton, sprained his right knee on Dec. 1 in St. Louis, Arians turned to Lindley rather than Thomas to finish the game.

"He was calm as a cucumber out there," Arians said before Wednesday's practice.

Largely because the Cardinals are down to a third-string, maybe fourth-string, quarterback, oddsmakers have made Seattle an eight-point favorite on the road.

"I think it's all about money in Vegas," Lindley said. "They're just dealing with facts. They aren't worrying about the people and the intangibles."

Arizona drafted Lindley in the sixth round out of San Diego State in 2012. With the Cardinals' season circling the drain, then-coach Ken Whisenhunt made the rookie the starter with the team in the midst of losing 11 of its last 12 games.

The results weren't good. Lindley completed 52 percent of his passes for 752 yards and zero touchdowns. He was intercepted seven times. His 181 passes attempted — including 10 last week — are the most in NFL history without a touchdown.

But this is a far better team than the one two years ago, and Lindley insists he's a different quarterback.

"It's night and day," he said.

Steady: Carroll's approach differs from Cardinals' Arians

FROM BACK PAGE

Clearly what Carroll has implemented has worked. For the fourth time in Carroll's five seasons with Seattle, the Seahawks are in contention for a division title going into the final weeks of the regular season.

But after being in control of home-field advantage and the No. 1 seed for most of last season, this Week 16 showdown with Arizona is significant.

A victory by the Cardinals gives them the NFC West title and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs, needing just two wins to play in the Super Bowl on their home field.

For the Seahawks, a victory wouldn't guarantee a playoff spot unless they get some help earlier in the day. But it would potentially leave Seattle needing just one home victory over St. Louis in Week 17 to clinch the division title and home-field advantage.

Two wins would give Seattle the No. 1 seed in the NFC as long as it doesn't finish in a tie at 12-4 with Dallas, in which case the Cowboys would hold the tiebreaker. Seattle would win any two-way tiebreakers with Detroit, Green Bay or Arizona and all three-way tiebreakers go in favor of the Seahawks.

Why is that important for Seattle? Over the past three seasons, playoffs included, the Seahawks are 23-2 at home and have outscored opponents by an average of 14 points per game.

"The amount I've learned and not only grown as a person in two years, but from these guys — B.A. (Arians), from Carson, from Drew. I'm a totally different person and totally different player from that point."

He said the biggest difference

between now and then is "knowing what's coming."

"Obviously the first time out there before, it's new, and you don't know exactly what's going to happen," Lindley said. "But now, through experience, through seeing how these guys Drew and

"I think it's important that if you're going to play at your best and perform at a very high level you have to be comfortable with the setting, and if you're uncomfortable and unsure it can make a difference and distract you some," Carroll said.

"We have that going for us. We feel very good about that. We have been in winning situations in December and it's been the chance for us to do some really good things and we've come through for a good part of that."

While Seattle tries to keep important games on the same level as every other matchup, Arizona coach Bruce Arians said Wednesday he wants his players to embrace the scope of Sunday's matchup.

"You don't get to play for the damn thing very often so it's not like Seattle's played for it for a hundred damn years. I'm sure they're embracing it also," Arians said. "So you fight your (rear) off all year to play for this game and sure you embrace it but you don't change how you prepare for it, it's still the same process."

Notes: Seattle C Max Unger (ankle/knee) did not practice Wednesday. Carroll said Unger struggled to recover from his work last week. He's missed the past four games. ... LT Russell Okung (chest) is "still in the mix" for Sunday but was scheduled to have additional exams on Thursday to check his recovery from a bruised lung.

Carson prepare, how Philip (Rivers) prepares out in San Diego, I just feel a lot more ready at this point."

Lindley said it's "50-50" as to whether his playing time in 2012 did more harm than good.

"The biggest thing is if you

don't let it affect your confidence too much," he said, "anything's a learning experience."

He said he got through it with the support of his family and his faith.

"It's just trusting in whatever the plan will be," Lindley said. "Just waiting for this opportunity. I feel extremely blessed and excited that it's here."

Arians dismisses the term "game manager." He said the Cardinals won't scale back their style just because of the quarterback. He has, however, tailored a game plan to Lindley's skills.

"There are some things in the offense he likes to throw," Arians said. "Each guy's got two or three things that they like a little bit more than the others."

Asked where Lindley concerns him, Arians responded, "He really doesn't."

"He's a meticulous preparation guy," the coach said. "The dynamics between us — I've bounced things off him. I trust him as far as his mental makeup to the game."

To keep the Seahawks guessing, Arians has developed a package for Thomas and says he might use both quarterbacks.

But it's Lindley at center stage, with the support of a coach whose former pupils include Peyton Manning, Andrew Luck and Ben Roethlisberger.

"It's tough to find at this level, a guy that you want to pour it out into the field for," Lindley said, "and B.A. gets his guys to play their best for him."

NFL

Pats keep eyes on bigger prize

New England focuses on pursuit of another berth in Super Bowl

By HOWARD ULMAN
The Associated Press

The souvenirs from Darrelle Revis' first division title in his brilliant eight-year career were safely stowed in his bag.

For long-time New England players, the T-shirt with the message "PATRIOTS RUN THE EAST" and the championship hat are just the latest in a huge collection — six straight AFC East titles and 11 of the last 12.

Wide receiver Julian Edelman has won it in all six of his NFL seasons. Defensive tackle Vince Wilfork has won 10 in his 11 seasons.

"I'm blessed. I'm lucky. It's all of that," Wilfork said. "What can you say?"

The enthusiasm after the Patriots clinched the division with a 41-13 rout of the Miami Dolphins on Sunday was tempered by their pursuit of greater goals — home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs, a berth in the Super Bowl and another NFL championship. They won three in four seasons but none in the next nine.

Revis did make it to the AFC title game twice, in the 2009 and 2010 seasons. His New York Jets were a wild-card team in 2010 then beat the Patriots in Foxborough 28-21 in a divisional game before losing to Pittsburgh 24-19 in the conference championship game.

Revis wanted to get back there so he chose New England over other options when he became a free agent after one injury-marred season with Tampa Bay.

"Just to win," he said of his motivation in signing with the Patriots.

And the division title?

"It's my first one, so I'm very excited," the five-time Pro Bowl cornerback said. "It took a lot of hard work and I'm just excited. This is my first time so I'm happy to wear the hat and wear the T-shirt. It's pretty awesome."

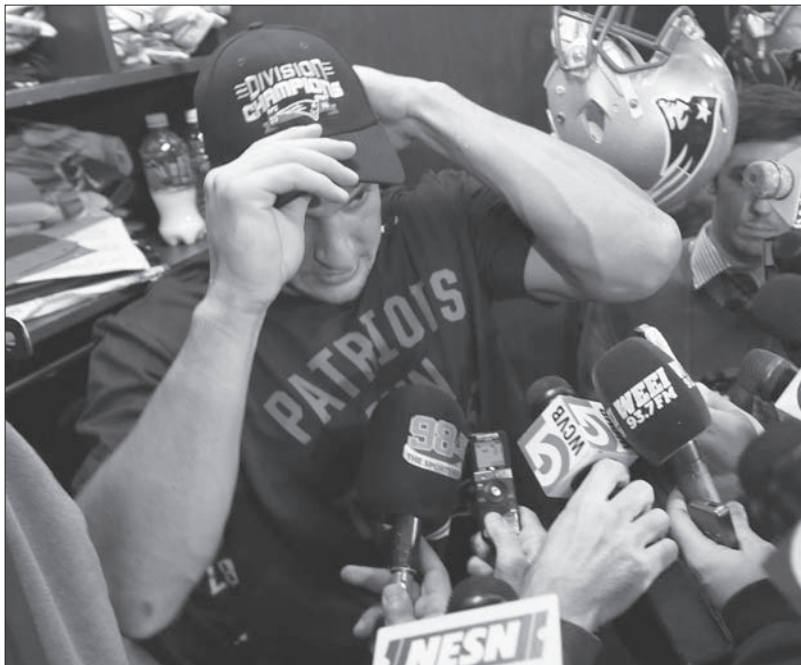
The Patriots can take another step toward their next goal, the top seed in the AFC, by beating Revis' former team. They visit the New York Jets (3-11) on Sunday before finishing the regular season at home against the Buffalo Bills (8-6), a team they beat 37-22 the road on Oct. 12.

They were criticized prematurely by many when they split their first four games, including a 41-14 loss in Kansas City that left them at 2-2 and tied for the AFC East lead with Buffalo and Miami.

"We really didn't care how people felt about us," Wilfork said in the locker room after Sunday's win. "The one thing we had was the people in here and our fans, our true fans. It always feels good to win the East, I'll tell you that."

Even if the competition within the division has been mediocre throughout the Patriots' domination of more than a decade.

In the 12 seasons starting in 2003, the Patriots are 57-13 against AFC East foes, a



PHOTOS BY CHARLES KRUPA/AP

New England tight end Rob Gronkowski puts on a cap signifying his team's clinching of the AFC East title with a 41-13 win over the Dolphins. The team's enthusiasm over the win was tempered by its pursuit of greater goals, including the Super Bowl.

winning percentage of .814.

Against the rest of the league, they're 92-28 and .766.

They're 21-2 against Buffalo in that stretch with the next meeting on Dec. 28, although the Bills won Sunday against Green Bay, which had beaten New England.

Next Sunday's game at the Jets is another installment in a heated rivalry. New York coach Rex Ryan could have extra incentive to beat the Patriots before his widely expected departure after this season.

The Patriots should be heavily favored in both but always speak highly of their opponents and study and practice hard before each game.

"Every year we have a great opportunity to try to accomplish something," quarterback Tom Brady said. "It doesn't start this morning. It started back in March. It's a lot of hard work that goes into winning."

It's not that you ever take winning for granted.

"I certainly don't because I know how hard it is to win."

No matter how many division championship T-shirts are hanging in your closet.



Patriots outside linebacker Dont'a Hightower, rear, tackles Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill alongside Patriots cornerback Darrelle Revis on Sunday. Revis earned his first division title, part of the reason he chose New England as a free agent.

'It's a lot of hard work that goes into it. I don't think you ever take winning for granted. I certainly don't because I know how hard it is to win.'

Tom Brady
Patriots quarterback

NFL

Reports: Cutler benched

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — Multiple reports say the Chicago Bears are benching quarterback Jay Cutler and going with Jimmy Clausen.

ESPN first reported Wednesday that the Bears were switching quarterbacks, with Clausen getting the nod over Cutler for Sunday's game against the Detroit Lions. The Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times, citing sources, also reported the switch.

The Bears would not confirm the move.

Coach Marc Trestman said earlier Wednesday he was not getting the most out of Cutler, but he did not mention benching the quarterback. He did not re-veal the switch when asked about "Monday Night Football" analyst Jon Gruden calling for Clausen to relieve Cutler during Chicago's loss to New Orleans.

49ers cut McDonald

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Citing a pattern of behavior and off-field issues, San Francisco 49ers general manager Trent Baalke informed defensive lineman Ray McDonald that he was released Wednesday amid a sexual assault investigation by San Jose police.

Baalke spoke with McDonald and his agent by phone around 11:30 a.m. PST to let them know the defender is "terminated." After the recent allegations concerning Ray McDonald, we as an organization notified him and his agent that he will be terminated, released immediately, effective immediately," Baalke said. "While this organization has a strong belief in due process and has demonstrated that over time, Ray's demonstrated a pattern of behavior, making that has led to multiple distractions to this organization and this football team that really can no longer be tolerated."

San Jose police Sgt. Heather Randol said Wednesday that the department is investigating McDonald on suspicion of sexual assault and had searched his San Jose home.

Randol said an area hospital notified police late Tuesday night that a woman was seeking treatment.

Newton practicing again

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Cam Newton returned to practice Wednesday eight days after a horrific-looking automobile accident left him with two fractures in his lower back.

Whether or not he starts Sunday against the Cleveland Browns remains unclear.

Panthers coach Ron Rivera said the team put Newton through a "rigorous" rehab schedule and will now wait to see how much soreness the fourth-year quarterback has on Thursday. Rivera wouldn't say definitively if he'll start Newton or Derek Anderson in a game with playoff implications for the Panthers (5-8-1).

The Panthers are a half-game behind the New Orleans Saints in the NFC South with two games remaining.

— The Associated Press

Ravens get favorable playoff path

Baltimore can clinch berth with wins against fading Houston, Cleveland

By DAVID GINSBURG

The Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — During a season filled with unexpected obstacles and aggravating injuries, the Baltimore Ravens appear to be finally catching a break in their effort to earn a playoff berth.

After squeezing past struggling Jacksonville 20-12 on Sunday, Baltimore (9-5) moved into the AFC's second wild-card slot and remained tied with Pittsburgh in the AFC North, a half-game behind Cincinnati (8-4-1).

It's come down to this: Baltimore will clinch a postseason berth — its sixth in the past seven years — with victories in its last two games.

"Two games left, two wins needed," coach John Harbaugh said Monday. "That's probably what I'll be saying to the guys tomorrow."

The schedule appears favorable. This week's opponent, Houston, lost two quarterbacks to injury in a 17-10 defeat in Indianapolis on Sunday.

Baltimore then wraps up the regular season at home against fading Cleveland, which lost 30-0 to Cincinnati on Sunday.

Even better for the Ravens: Pittsburgh and Cincinnati are looking at a potentially rough home stretch. The Steelers (9-5) host Kansas City (8-6) on Sunday and Cincinnati takes on Denver (11-3). Then, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh square off in the season finale Dec. 28.

Harbaugh is concerned only about Baltimore, and he isn't taking anything for granted — even though Houston (7-7) will likely start either Thaddeus Lewis or Case Keenum at quarterback. Lewis joined the team last month and Keenum was signed Monday after being cut in the preseason.

The Ravens can't be overconfident, though, not after their uneven performance against the Jaguars (2-12).

"We didn't play as well as we hoped or as we planned for," Harbaugh acknowledged. "We anticipated a tough game. Anybody that would



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles, left, is sacked by Ravens inside linebacker C.J. Mosley (57) and outside linebacker Terrell Suggs on Sunday.

anticipate a blowout in this league is a fool."

The Ravens won the game but lost two more defensive backs. Cornerback Asa Jackson and safety Terrence Brooks sustained season-ending knee injuries and will join cornerbacks Jimmy Smith, Danny Gorrer, Aaron Ross and Trammie Jacobs on injured reserve.

Baltimore is also playing without suspended defensive tackle Haloti Ngata, the second player on the team to be suspended by the NFL this season (along with Ray Rice).

In spite of it all, the Ravens are right where they want to be with two weeks to go.

"I'm excited about our team. I like where we're at," Harbaugh said. "I think we're getting stronger and I also think there's room for

improvement, which gives me a lot of encouragement and excitement."

There's also something to be said for a team that wins when it doesn't play particularly well. Baltimore's offense produced only one touchdown and trailed at halftime before rallying past the Jaguars.

"It would have [stunk] if we lost," said Terrell Suggs, who had 2½ of Baltimore's eight sacks. "But you've got to commend this whole team, offense and defense alike for putting it away this time. Last time we were here, we let one get away from us, and we couldn't close it out. Good teams, they don't make the same mistake twice and we did a good job of finishing in the fourth quarter."

Bills can only win, and cross fingers

By JOHN WAWROW

The Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Running back Fred Jackson doesn't have the time or patience to figure out the various scenarios that ensure the Buffalo Bills staying alive in the AFC playoff picture for one more week.

Jackson's only concern is Buffalo (8-6) traveling to play Oakland (2-12) on Sunday.

"I haven't looked at it because it's all irrelevant if we don't win," Jackson said Wednesday. "That's the number one thing we've got to focus on is taking care of our business."

The Bills' playoff chances have come down to winning and hoping for a team that will be eliminated with a loss or tie.

Beating the Raiders might not be enough either. Because of tie-breaking formulas, Buffalo ranks ninth out of the conference's nine teams with eight more wins.

At 9-6, Buffalo would still be eliminated should Pittsburgh and Baltimore, both 9-5, win Sunday, and Cincinnati (9-4-1) defeats Denver on Monday night, accord-



Buffalo Bills (8-6)
at Oakland Raiders (2-12)

AFN-Xtra

10:25 p.m. Sunday CET

6:25 a.m. Sunday JKT



ing to STATS.

The chances of making the playoffs don't get much easier even if the Bills stay alive beyond this weekend.

They close their schedule traveling to play AFC East rival New England, where the Bills have never won since Gillette Field opened in 2002.

Difficult as it might be for the Bills to not control their own destiny, several veterans are encouraged with how a team in the midst of a 14-season playoff drought has displayed signs of rounding the corner.

Coming off last weekend's 21-13 victory over Green Bay, Buffalo assured itself of its first eight-win season since going 9-7 in 2004.

As for the playoff hunt, the last time the Bills were in contention entering Week 16 was in 2006, when they proceeded to lose their final two games en route to a 7-9 finish.

"It's meaningful, but it's not surprising," center Eric Wood said, referring to Buffalo being in contention. "I felt like this was the position we'd be in. I probably wish we'd be in a more controlling position, but being in the hunt, I'm not surprised."

The Bills are in mix largely because of a dominating defense playing at an elite level.

Buffalo leads the NFL with 49 sacks, is second with 30 takeaways and tied for second with 19 interceptions.

In a 24-17 loss at Denver two weeks ago, the Bills ended Peyton Manning's touchdown passing streak at 51 games.

The defense was even better in shutting down Aaron Rodgers and the Packers on Sunday.

Rodgers threw two interceptions and fumbled into the end zone for a safety to finish with a career-worst 34.3 passer rating.

Cornerback Corey Graham said there's too much on the line for Buffalo to look past the Raiders and rookie quarterback Derek Carr.

"You can't have a letdown when it's a must-win for you," Graham said. "It's not a trap game at all."

The defense's stoutness has made up for Buffalo's offensive deficiencies.

The Kyle Orton-led unit has scored just eight touchdowns in its past six games. Orton is coming off his worst outing since second-year starter EJ Manuel was benched following a 2-2 start.

Orton went 14-for-27 for 158 yards and an interception. With 253 yards offense, Buffalo failed to hit 300 yards for the fourth time in seven games.

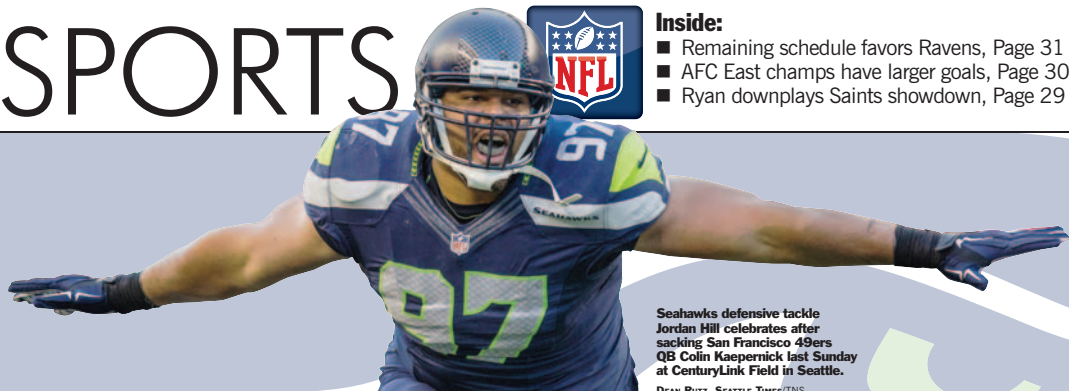
"It's a weekly battle to improve consistency. That starts with me," Orton said. "It's our job to score points. And we've got to do a better job of that. That means I've got to do better."

SPORTS



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- Ryan downplays Saints showdown, Page 29



Seahawks defensive tackle Jordan Hill celebrates after sacking San Francisco 49ers QB Colin Kaepernick last Sunday at CenturyLink Field in Seattle.

DEAN RUTZ, SEATTLE TIMES/TNS

STEADY SEAHAWKS

Defending champions thrive by taking same approach each week

By TIM BOOTH
The Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — At some point every week, Pete Carroll will describe the upcoming opponent as a "championship opportunity."

Every week. Without fail. No matter the quality of the competition or the setting of the game. The end goal is that when a big game arrives — like last February's Super Bowl, or Sunday's NFC West showdown with Arizona — it's handled in the same way as any other week.

"We're not going into this game thinking we're unfamiliar with it or it's going to be something we don't know how to handle or what's up. We don't feel like that at all," Carroll said Wednesday. "That comes from years of experience and being through it and a bunch of young guys now that they're pretty well experienced at the timing of these kinds of games."



Seattle Seahawks (10-4)
at Arizona Cardinals (11-3)

AFN-Sports
2:20 a.m. Monday CET
10:20 a.m. Monday JKT



That attitude and approach took a while to kick in. Richard Sherman first noticed it when Seattle won at Washington in the 2012 NFC playoffs. Cliff Avril and Michael Bennett — newcomers during Seattle's title run in 2013 — started to understand where Carroll was coming from about midway through the season.

"It's all about preparing the same, don't get too high because it's a Monday night game or because it's a 1 p.m. game or whatever," Avril said. "Treat every game the same and you'll get probably the same results."

SEE STEADY ON PAGE 29

Cardinals turn to little-known QB for biggest game of season

By BOB BAUM
The Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Arizona coach Bruce Arians cut quarterback Ryan Lindley at the end of the preseason.

Now he's put the offense in Lindley's hands in the biggest game of the Cardinals' season.

Arizona's
Ryan Lindley

JEFF ROBERSON/AP

The third-year quarterback, who made four unimpressive starts as a rookie, will be thrown into the teeth of the fierce Seattle defense Sunday night.

It's a tough spot for someone who never took a snap as Arizona's No. 3 quarterback last year, then was released in favor of rookie Logan Thomas at the end of this preseason.

SEE QB ON PAGE 29



A look at the best bowl games outside 'New Year's Six'

College football, Page 25

Grizzlies defeat Spurs in triple overtime

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